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**VIEW FROM  
A WINDOW**



# VIEW FROM A WINDOW

*A Novel by*  
F. Ruth Howard

*Author of GREEN ENTRY*



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**BY F. RUTH HOWARD**

FOR  
PHILIP



## **BOOK ONE**





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## Chapter One

JANET turned over on her stomach and lifted her head. She opened one eye and looked at the table beside the bed. The clock said "Eight-forty-five," and the little calendar beyond it said "October Third, 1941." She let her head fall again and buried it deep in the pillow. It was day—and it was snowing the first snow of the year, much too early. But it had to be snowing, because this was going to be a bad day—and all her life it had either rained or snowed, according to season, whenever she was in trouble.

Under the covers, she opened and closed the injured hand, trying to imagine that it felt more flexible, more as if it were her own hand and not a stiff, clumsy substitute which had been tacked onto the end of her arm.

She wished the day was over. She wished she'd already had the doctor's report. She wished it wasn't snowing—not today.

That was awfully stupid, though, to think that the considered and weighty report of the most eminent doctor in his line could be made any different by the weather. She was confusing cause and effect or something. Either there was hope in further surgery, or there wasn't. She might as well face it.

She rolled over on her back and opened her eyes. It was snowing quite heavily. She could tell by the strange absence of all familiar sounds from the distant roadway and

the nearer stable-yard. She could see, too, a thick grey-spotted whiteness, vague through the venetian blinds. She wondered for a moment why she was so determined upon getting up and driving all the way into New York, when all she really had to do was to call Doctor Carton and ask him; ask him point-blank; just say, "Well, can my hand be fixed or can't it?"

But she knew the answer, as well as she knew that within an hour or so she would be on her way. She was going—and she was going because she couldn't help feeling there was something cowardly about accepting a verdict of this importance in comfort and privacy. That was the easy way, made for easy things.

She sat up in bed and shouted, "Hattie!" and lay back again and heard an answering call from below and, in a moment, slow feet upon the stairs.

The bedroom door swung open—and an impossible, towering mass of deep-red roses filled its frame. The mass was contained in a basket of effulgent gilt, and two large black hands were fastened one upon each side of its arching handle. Beneath the basket were six inches of starched linen and two thick, white-cotton ankles.

Janet laughed—and was annoyed with herself because the sound was tainted with anger; she'd forgotten that today was also the day when her divorce from Mark became final.

She said, "Good morning, Hattie. And I won't ask where they came from!"

The basket was lowered to the floor, and Hattie stood behind it, her bulk heaving with effort and indignation.

"Mr. Mark, I s'pose!" She regarded the flowers with her head on one side and her hands on her hips. "Letter

come with 'em too." She sniffed as she took an envelope from her apron pocket and set it down upon the bed.

"Sho' is snowin'," she said. "Maybe you'd best stay home, an' . . ."

Janet said, "You bring me some coffee, Hattie," and waited until she was alone and then picked up the envelope and ripped it open.

There was a card in it; a large card which had a deep black border and bore two words only, in funereal engraving—"In Memoriam."

Mark was certainly running true to form! She tore the card into careful bits and stacked them upon the table beside her. She wondered what he'd told the newspapers. She was almost afraid to look, but when the paper came with the orange juice and coffee, she disregarded the heavy, Hitler-haunted headlines and turned the unwieldy pages quickly, looking for it.

It was there all right—very prominent on page three. Mark's press agent had done a wonderful job. The headlines were a two-column spread, and looked large and gloating. The "story" was underneath them, and there were pictures—one of Mark, very smug and handsome in the uniform which he wore in his new play; one of herself, taken in court on the day of the interlocutory decree.

She wondered why she bothered to read the stuff. It was all so stupid. . . . "*Janet Elliot, Beautiful Pianist . . . Mark Lindstrom, Noted Actor . . . Divorce Made Absolute . . . Echoes of Famous Romance . . .* 'It's just one of those things,' said Mr. Lindstrom, a little wistfully. 'But there are no hard feelings, thank heaven! I and my wife—I should say my ex-wife—are the best of pals!'"

She pushed the paper away and tried to laugh: Wasn't

it like American papers, printing nonsense like that with the rest of the civilized world in agony! . . .

It was strange, though, and remarkably fortunate that they hadn't found out anything about her hand. Bernie'd promised her he'd keep them off it, but she'd never quite believed he'd be able to. Because, whichever way you looked at it, it would make a wonderful story. It had all the elements.

She began to drink her coffee and didn't notice that it was almost cold. They'd find out soon enough if—if the snow meant anything. She only had to close her eyes to see the head-lines: *"Famous Concert-Artist Injured in Fall With Brother's Racehorse . . . Lovely Janet Elliot's Career Ended . . . Airman Brother Shocked By News . . . Mark Lindstrom Condoles With Ex-Wife . . ."*

She tried to tell herself that it wasn't so bad really. And they weren't so silly to print it if they thought it would interest people. All the same, it would be very nice, in most ways, to have no news-value at all unless you did something startling, like sawing your mother in half or shooting your baby out of a cannon. . . .

Hattie came crackling back into the room, very purposeful.

"Miz Janet," she said, "if you's goin', you better git goin'!" She began opening drawers and closets and setting out clothes. "Benjy jest come in 'bout the horse. He says the snow ain't layin' an' the horse's got to git rode."

Janet climbed out of bed. "Can't be done today, Hattie. You'd better tell Benjy to lunge him—and say I'll ride tomorrow for sure."

"You shouldn't be a'ridin' that horse!" Hattie's husky voice was almost shrill. "After what he done to your hand! Mr. Bruce, he wouldn't . . ."

"Hattie!" said Janet warningly—and smiled to herself as the door closed with a half-checked slamming.

She made for the bathroom, thinking about McTavish. Poor old Mac! Hattie really had a grudge against him—and even Benjy seemed to blame him just a little. . . .

She turned on the shower and let the hot water course all over her body and went on thinking about McTavish, feeling better when she remembered Bruce's last letter. Bruce didn't blame him. Bruce knew him. Even from the sketchy description she had written him, Bruce knew that any horse with less than Mac's extraordinary sense and courage and handiness would have smashed her to pieces instead of just cracking her hand. . . .

There she was, back at the hand again. She was drying herself now, and the hand gripped the towel as strongly as it ever had. It did a lot of things as well as it ever had. It turned faucets, and tightened girths, and held hair-brushes, and fastened buttons, and fixed curb-chains, and switched on lights, and tied shoestrings, and manipulated cigarettes: it did pretty nearly everything. And it didn't hurt any more. It was just stiff and odd-feeling. And it would barely stretch an octave. . . .

She'd better stop thinking about it. She'd better start thinking about something else—something else to do—just in case the snow really was a forecast of Dr. Carton's verdict.

That wasn't a bad idea of Bruce's—about taking McTavish back to California to have a try at the Ventana Gran Premio. It wasn't a bad idea at all. She'd been thinking about it ever since his letter. Mac had been a great horse. He was still a great horse. He wasn't really old—not when you thought of some of the historic 'chasers. And she supposed she *could* train him. Bruce must think she could,

or he wouldn't ever have suggested it. And there'd be two or three men out there who might ride him right—Murdoch and O'Toole, for instance. And perhaps the idea about stabling behind that funny Inn near the border was a good one, too. . . .

The whole thing wasn't a bad idea. Maybe she'd do it. It was a good idea. It would be something worthwhile doing if—if there wasn't anything else to do. . . .

She glanced out of the steam-fogged window—and saw that the soft, heavy white flakes were still leisurely falling.

They were still falling two hours later, as she drove into New York. It was difficult to see, and the metronomical sweepings of the windshield-wiper made a misty fan through which the angry tail light of the truck ahead glared as importantly as if it were night.

The flakes sifted down thickly onto the engine hood and pulled a grey, mushy curtain over the windows. The flakes were white and beautiful in the air, but they changed as they touched the road, instantly merging into the dirty, greyish-yellow carpet made by their predecessors.

A bell rang blatantly, and a stop light flashed on. She eased the car to a standstill and waited for the signal to change. She could see shadowy hulks crawling in ranks across the intersection, and she was suddenly glad of the snow because it hid the drivers and their faces.

She drove on automatically for the rest of the journey. She tried not to think about Dr. Carton. She tried not to think. She wanted to be a robot in a chain of robots.

She was surprised when she found herself on Park Avenue and in the Seventies, with only a block or two to go. She came to herself with a most unpleasant shiver, and began to feel cold and slightly sick at her stomach as she

turned left and drew near the trim, self-effacing house of brownstone. . . .

As usual, there was no place to park, and she drove across Madison and nearly to Fifth before she found a garage and turned into it. The man wanted to call a taxi for her, but she suddenly decided she would walk. The snow was thin and reluctant now—and she wouldn't be there quite so quickly. . . .

She went slowly for the first block, and then began to go faster. The sidewalk was covered with slippery mush, and she had no rubbers and her feet were cold and her shoulders felt damp through her coat and there was an empty, frightened ache inside her which grew more and more uncomfortable.

She thought suddenly of sunshine and turquoise water and Juan Les Pins—and then wished she hadn't thought of them because they made her think of Bruce. She thought of him first as he was when they had been taken as children for those two glorious winters to the Riviera—a small and solid brother, square and grave and utterly unpredictable. And then, skipping thirteen years, she thought of him in silks, with a dirt-streaked, grinning face, swaying easily to a blowing horse's walk—to McTavish's walk—as he made his way to the winner's circle. . . .

But then she thought of him—she couldn't help it—in the clumsy flying-suit of the fighter-pilots of the R.A.F.; the clothes he was wearing in the snapshot which had come in his last letter. And she thought of him and the others in their planes, and the planes as little swooping specks in the sky which mingled all at once with other specks until from one of them came a belching trail of smoke, and pieces breaking off, and . . .

She collided squarely with a head-down, hurrying man.

Her feet nearly slid from under her, but he caught at her arm and steadied her neatly and then, without a word, went on his rapid way. She tried to laugh, but couldn't make much of a job of it.

She walked unseeingly past the doctor's house. Dear Bruce, she thought. Dear, dear Bruce!

She came to a corner and saw it was the wrong one. She retraced her steps to the house and rang the bell and found herself being gushingly greeted by the nurse-receptionist, who wore pince-nez and was fond of music.

"Oh, Miss Elliot! I'm so glad you made it! And in this terrible weather too! Dr. Carton was just about to give you up and go out to lunch!" The pince-nez glittered as she took Janet's coat and shook it fussily. "Now you just go right in to Doctor's room and sit down, Miss Elliot. I'll have him with you in two twinkles!"

Janet knew the room. It was big and comfortable and gray-green. It was very quiet, and a clock on the huge desk ticked with self-satisfied but pleasant modulation.

She settled herself slowly in the armchair she had sat in before. She didn't think. She knew that her feet were cold and damp, and her skirt was cold and damp across her knees. There was an envelope lying alone upon the blotter in front of the doctor's chair. It had a name scrawled over it in pencil. It was a big flat envelope—and it probably contained the latest x-rays of the hand.

One of the inner doors—the white one which led to the surgery—opened to admit the doctor.

"Ah, Miss Elliot!" He smiled at her and shut the door quietly and went to the desk with long strides and sat behind it and faced her.

He cleared his throat—and Janet looked at him and knew.



She didn't feel anything, except a queer certainty that she not only was aware of what he was going to tell her but also knew exactly what he was thinking.

He cleared his throat again and tapped the big envelope and leaned forward a little, his arms on the desk. He said:

"Miss Elliot, I've examined these x-rays very carefully—very carefully indeed. . . ."

Janet stopped him. "I don't want to know *why* it's no good, Doctor." She tried to smile; her mouth felt stiff, but she insisted upon smiling. "I knew when you walked in what the answer was."

She went on smiling, and the doctor moved uneasily in his chair. He said:

"We're not going to operate again. Ah . . . it wouldn't be any use. There is a small . . ."

Janet stood up, and he cut himself short in mid-speech. She said:

"Really, I don't want to know *why*. I just wanted to know. And now I do, so why don't I go?"

The doctor stood up too. He spoke with a quick access of warmth, sounding curiously unprofessional.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am!" he said. "I know how *I'd* feel if something happened that stopped me doing my work!"

Janet turned the smile full on him: it felt more natural now.

She said, "Thank you," and crossed to the window and looked out.

"It's stopped snowing," she said—and turned toward the door.

He went quickly past her to open it. He seemed relieved by the necessity for action.

She almost walked straight by him, but then remembered and turned to face him.

"Good-by, Dr. Carton," she said. "And thank you again."

He didn't say anything. He looked at her and bowed, very slightly. She went through the door and he closed it behind her.

She took her coat from the girl and disregarded the kindness of the eyes behind the glasses and took herself out of the house as quickly as she could.

She turned right, in the direction of the garage, and began to walk and reached the place without any recollection of having traversed the full two blocks. Under the archway she halted, suddenly conscious that all the time the hand had been burrowed deep into her coat pocket; burrowed deep, and tightly, painfully clenched. She had an unreasonable desire to take it out and stare at it; stare at it in the sort of horrified fascination with which cripples always affected her.

But she didn't. She took it from the pocket and made it search in her bag for a cigarette. She looked at it, almost furtively, as it struck a match—and was surprised by the surprise she felt when she saw it was exactly like the other one.

She took herself to task—and found that she knew precisely what she was going to do with the rest of the day; it was all laid out in her mind, as neatly as if she had been consciously planning.

It was twenty minutes past one when she gave the car to the porter outside the almost invisible entrance to the Granada Room. She went slowly down the narrow stairs, stopped halfway at the ladies' room on the mezzanine and did what she could with comb and powder and lipstick, and presently was going through the little archway into

the sudden and surprising sweep of the raised bar and the dining room below it.

A drink was the first entry upon the neat schedule which had so suddenly appeared inside her head; a man-sized, stinging, burning drink. She made for one of the little tables at the far end of the bar, away from the knot of people near the door, and wondered where Louis was and then saw him hurrying toward her.

"Hello, Louis," she said. "I haven't seen you for a long time."

He bowed his impressive bow which should always have made him look silly but never did.

"Far too long, Miss Elliot," he said. He had been smiling when he came toward her, but the smile faded now and was replaced by a look of concern far too indefinite to be anything but soothing. Without asking which table she had picked, he steered her to the right one and seated her and hovered.

"You were waiting for someone, Miss Elliot?"

She smiled at him. "No, I'm alone. And I want a drink and some lunch and some notepaper and an envelope. But the drink's very important, Louis. It doesn't have to be very nice, and it mustn't be ladylike—but it has to burn!" Looking up at him and his ever-increasing appearance of concern, she suddenly laughed. "It's all right," she said. "I've had a foul morning, that's all—and I don't like the weather."

Louis beamed, but a little doubtfully. "A Sazerac," he said firmly, and was gone, snapping his fingers at the bartender.

He brought it back to her himself—and at the same moment a boy came with the writing paper. Louis took it

from him and laid it on the table beside the drink; then watched anxiously while she lifted the glass and tasted.

"Louis," she said, "you're a wonderful person!" She sipped again. She didn't like the taste, but the authentic burning was immediately apparent.

"It's *exactly* right!" she said. "Now do some more magic. I want lunch—but I don't want to know what I'm eating."

"I will do my best, Miss Elliot. And the table in the far corner?"

She shook her head. "I hate to move," she said. "And I like it here."

"It is a pity that your brother is not with you," Louis said.

Janet stared at him. "You're uncanny today, Louis!" She opened her purse and took out her pen. "I'm just going to write to him."

"He is all right, eh?" The gloss of Louis's polish melted a little in the heat of his interest. "Teaching those Nazis they do not own the air over Britain, eh?"

Janet said, "I had a letter day before yesterday. He was fine then." She began to unscrew the cap of the pen. "I'll say hello from you, shall I?"

Louis beamed. "Yes. Please. And say that he is to get that war over quick; and come home and make me some more money riding those horses!"

He bustled away, still smiling. Janet took another swallow from her glass and pulled the paper in front of her and began to write.

"Bruce darling," she wrote, "You said in your letter that I was to tell you at once. So here it is—

"I've just left Carton—and it's no good. There's no point in operating again. The hands all right for everything—except the piano. So that's that.

*"I don't feel too good—and terribly wish you were here or I were there; anything if I could see you."*

She set down the pen and read it over. It sounded far too tragic, and she made a movement as if to tear up the sheet. But she checked herself. It wouldn't be any good not telling Bruce, or lying to him: he'd see through the one and find out the other.

She looked up and caught the bar-waiter's eye and beckoned to him, and when he arrived ordered another Sazerac. It came and she finished it much too fast and lit a cigarette and began to write again between puffs. She wrote:

*"I'm in the Granada Room, and Louis has just sent you all sorts of messages. I'm also drinking Sazeracs for the first time. They're beastly—but they're hitting the spot. I'm feeling almost cheerful again—and I'm considering seriously your idea about getting Mac ready to run again at Ventana."*

*"Oh, Bruce, do you really think I could do it—because I half think I'm going to try, and I'm scared stiff! For God's sake send me a long list of all the do's and don't's you can think of. I suppose I shouldn't really be so worried, because I've watched you so often, and I do have a good memory, and I do know Mac so very, very well. But how do you think he'll go without you up? I must be very careful about that if I do it, mustn't I? I expect O'Toole and Francis and George Murdock will all be at Ventana—and I suppose any one of them would do. What do you think?"*

She looked up and saw Louis approaching. She smiled at him, and now the smile didn't feel stiff and awkward on her face.

"Ah!" said Louis. "That is better. That is very good." He hustled away to bring waiters.

They came, and brought her food which was certainly

delicious but which she didn't even know was there, although she ate in steady snatches between scribblings. She wrote:

*"If I do go, that funny inn would be just the place. The only trouble might be somewhere for me to sleep—but perhaps they'd let me have a room in that old empty house near the stables. I suppose I could find the inn again, even if I had to get lost the way we did before. You're really a very smart young man, Elliot—because I can't think of any more wonderful place to be than tucked away in those amazing hills—and some sunshine!*

*"Of course, the inn people might refuse to take a horse—the stables looked as if they hadn't been used for years, if you remember. However, if I haven't lost all my appeal, I might talk them into it."*

She had to break off. Her hand was aching uncomfortably and Louis was hovering and saying something about the lunch which she seemed to have finished.

She asked for coffee. "It was all marvelous, Louis!" she said. "You are a magician!"

He was satisfied and left her and in a moment sent a waiter with coffee. She drank two small cups and smoked a cigarette and then took up the pen again. She wrote:

*"I'm going up to see Bernie now—about canceling engagements and all that. Maybe I just want to see him. He's such a lamb."*

*"I'll write to you again tomorrow, when I've really made up my mind about this Ventana thing. And don't forget that the more you write to me, even if it's only a couple of lines, the better everything is."*

*"All good luck to you, darling, in whatever you're doing—always. Good-by until tomorrow—Janet."*

She finished the coffee and folded the sheets and put

them in the envelope and addressed it. She'd give it to Bernie to get off by Clipper. She paid her bill and thanked Louis again for the lunch and found her car and drove up to Fifth Avenue and turned left. It was two-thirty and she stood a good chance of finding Bernie in his office if she didn't waste any time. It wasn't snowing, but the sky was still lead-grey and the slush was thick on the roads. She couldn't help thinking of how the little white Inn would look in the sunlight, and of the strange hills around it which had seemed too like something by Rockwell Kent to be possible. And she couldn't help thinking of Mac's head watching her out of a box-door as she worked in the stable-yard; he would have that strangely tolerant, ironic twist to his mouth which Bruce had always said seemed to put him apart from other horses. And her muscles would be aching beautifully from hard work. And the sun would be hot on her back. And one room of the old house would have a bed and all her things in it. And there wouldn't be anyone she would have to talk to. And she wouldn't even have to read the papers.

"I believe I can do it!" she said aloud. "I think I will do it!"

Miraculously, she found a parking space right opposite the office building. She edged the car neatly into it and jumped out and ran across the sidewalk and found an elevator waiting and was borne rapidly up to the twenty-second floor, and in another minute was walking into Bernie's outer office and asking Hilda whether Mr. Arnstein was in.

He heard her voice and opened his door and stood there smiling at her. He was short and fat and heavy-shouldered and considerably overdressed. Though he had always just had a shave, and a close one, his jowls and chin were permanently blue. He was intensely Semitic and invariably smelt

expensively of colognes and shaving-lotions and pomades which never seemed to blend. He wore two rings which flashed brilliantly, one upon either hand, and today a new tie-pin which outsparkled them. He called all men "Jack," and all women "dear" or "honey." And he was, as well as being a wonderful combination of Agent and Manager and Financial Guide and General Adviser, the nicest human being, apart from Bruce, that Janet had ever known.

She said, "Bernie!" and he went on smiling and took both her hands and told her he was very happy to see her, dear, and took her into the office and settled her in the enormous chair facing his desk and gave her a cigarette and finally settled himself in his own chair and was ready to ask his question. He said:

"Listen, dear—you been back to that doctor?"

Janet nodded. "Yes, Bernie. No good. Finish." She told him all about it, very concisely.

He listened with a face which came as near to lacking expression as he could ever manage. He said, when she had finished:

"Well, dear, I suppose that's that!" He got to his feet and started to pace the big, over-luxurious office and, as he passed her chair, bent over and patted her hand which lay on the arm.

Janet said, "Don't worry about me, Bernie. I won't pretend it isn't an awfully unpleasant feeling—but I'm all right. And I'm going away for a bit. To California—southern California—near the Mexican border." She wasn't going to say anything about Mac.

Bernie went back to his chair and dropped into it heavily, so that it creaked.

He said, "Well—maybe it's a good idea to get away for a while." He smiled determinedly, making valiant effort



to be cheerful and ordinary. "How's Flight-Commander Bruce Elliot of the Eagle Squadron? How's he comin'?"

"His last letter was fine," Janet said. "He never tells me anything, of course, but he was well and seemed happy."

"Fine lad!" said Bernie. "Fine feller! Wish he was here to look after you, dear."

"Oh, Bernie!" Janet laughed. "Since when have I needed my young brother to look after me? I've done fairly well for myself so far, haven't I?—with your help, of course, Mr. Arnstein." She leaned forward in the vast chair. "You've been marvelous to me, Bernie," she said impulsively. "Nicer than anybody's ever been! And after you've canceled my engagements and kept the papers quiet, will you please go on looking after whatever money I have left—and me, too? Please, Bernie!"

Bernie coughed. He mumbled, "Thanks, dear," and looked as if a blush were trying to push its way through the dark blueness of his cheeks. "Thanks, dear," he said again.

There was silence for a moment or two—and then he leaned forward suddenly and pulled a pile of letters toward him. "Still want to rent the house?" he said. "Even if you don't go to California, it's too big for you, with young Bruce over in Britain."

"Of course I do," Janet said. "But remember what I told you. I want Hattie and Benjy to go with it. If they don't, I'll have to look after them."

"Don't worry, dear." He took one letter from the pile. "I've rounded up a tenant." He took the letter out of its envelope. "Here we are. And she does want the servants. Nice respectable lady from Texas—bags of dough, too."

Janet smiled. "That's nice for her," she said. "And nice

for me that she'll take the servants. When does she want to move in?"

"Next month, dear." Bernie seemed a little preoccupied, as if he weren't really much concerned with rentals. He stood up and began to walk, patting his forehead with a silk handkerchief. Janet caught a whiff of some new cologne she didn't recognize.

She said, "What's the matter, Bernie?" and watched him while he used the handkerchief again.

He put it back in his pocket. "Well, dear," he mumbled, "I was just wondering. I was just thinking that maybe if you needed any extra dough . . ." He stopped and began again. "What I'm trying to say, dear, is that no matter whether you stay here or go way out there to California, I just want you to know that you can depend on me—for anything—anytime. . . ."

Janet felt warm again—as warm as two Sazeracs and Louis's concern for Bruce had made her. She said:

"That's against your principles, Bernie! But I wouldn't hesitate to pull your ear if I needed anything." She put a hand on his arm. "Bless you—you're a darling!"

He patted the hand on his arm, and almost gulped, and went back to his super-swivel-chair behind the desk.

"I'm going to break the office rules!" he said. "We're going to have a drink. Right here and now!"

He ordered champagne and Janet sat upon the edge of the desk and chatted to him until it came. They had two glasses apiece, and they toasted Bruce and the R.A.F., and the clock hands kept creeping around, and Hilda kept buzzing to remind Bernie that he was already two-deep in overdue appointments—and finally Janet rose with determination and found her purse and said she was going and sounded as if she meant it.

"I'll send you the California address—if I go, Bernie. But you're not to give it to anyone! Understand? I don't want any people for a bit—or if I do, I'll let them know where they can find me."

"Okay," Bernie said. "Okay, dear." He stopped her as she was going to the door. "And I'll keep the newspaper boys from spreading it around . . . from saying anything—about you not . . . playing any more."

She turned back to him. "Bless you!" she said, and put her hands on his shoulders and kissed his cheek. It smelt differently from the handkerchief.

"Bless you, Bernie!" she said again, and took herself out.

The drive home, though necessarily slow, wasn't bad. In spite of the messy slipperiness of the roads and the mud-grey twilight of the sky, she almost enjoyed it. She was thinking about a stable-yard . . . and Mac looking at her over his door . . . and the sunshine hot upon her tired back . . . and a warm, hard world of physical labor, where there was nothing to think about except how happy Bruce would be when El McTavish—trained and galloped and rubbed-down and fed and fussed over by Janet Elliot—won the Ventana Gran Premio! To hell with music and practice and all the pianos and all the stages and platforms and every individual one of the faces which stared at them from above and below! To hell with Mark, and almost all her friends, and the State and City of New York! To hell with Hitler and doctors and snow which melted when it touched the ground! To hell with practically everything—except Bruce and Mac and Bernie, sunshine and Rockwell-Kentish hills. . . .

When she turned into the driveway of the house it had been dark for quite a long time. And, somewhere in the last

of the fifty miles, it had started to snow again. She stopped the car by the front door and left it for Benjy to fetch and scurried into the porch. She was groping for her key when the hall light went on and Hattie opened the door.

It was beautifully warm inside. There was a crackling fire in the hall itself and a glowing red one visible through the open door of the living-room.

Hattie was beaming. "Surprise f'r you, Miz Janet," she said—and pointed to the table where the mail was always laid.

Janet had flung off her hat already, but she didn't wait to take off the heavy coat. She made for the table and grabbed the topmost envelope; the long envelope with her name on it in Bruce's small but powerful scrawl and the odd-looking stamps and the strip across the top which said "Opened By Censor."

She felt wonderful. She didn't rip the envelope open, but laid it down again, with a careful little gesture, while she let Hattie take the coat from her.

Hattie said, "You's lookin' loads better, Miz Janet! That doctor, he must of tole you good!"

Even that—and she herself was surprised—did not dull the edge of Janet's pleasure. She said, "I'll tell you all about that in a little while, Hattie," and picked up the envelope. "After I've read this."

She took it into the living room and sat in the big chair near the fire and the lamp; the one which she and Bruce always used to fight over. She was very deliberate about it, setting the chair a little differently, sitting down slowly and working herself into the most comfortable position.

There was only a single sheet, very thin, inside the envelope. But what did that matter? She unfolded it slowly—and began to read.

"Dear Jay," she read. "*This is one of those scrawls. By*

the time it reaches you, you'll probably have had the doctor's verdict.

"It seems to me that whether this is good or bad, you won't be playing for a while—so please think very seriously about my suggestion of taking Mac and getting the hell out and getting him ready to grab the Ventana Premio and fifteen grand.

"Don't be scared of the job. You've always known a lot more about horses than you think you do—a hell of a lot more than many so-called trainers!

"I know you can do it, honey—so take a whirl at it. Love and good landings, Bruce."

She read it again—and found that she was on her feet. That settled it. She'd do it—and she'd start doing things about doing it at once—now—this minute.

She went out into the hall, and found Hattie at the foot of the stairs.

"Hattie . . ." she said—and then stopped abruptly as two ear-cracking explosions sounded just outside the house.

"Landsakes!" squealed Hattie. "Who'd be a'shootin'?" and then sighed with relief as there came the sound of an engine, and a crunching of gravel on the drive.

"Backfire," said Janet—and laughed.

The engine noises ceased and there was a clanking, metallic sound and then heavy feet on the porch and a rapping at the knocker.

Janet stood where she was. There was a light on the wall above her shoulder, and she looked at Bruce's letter again as Hattie went to the door.

She heard a murmur from Hattie and then a man's voice. An icy draft played about her ankles and she looked up just in time to catch a glimpse of a shiny-visored cap as Hattie closed the door and turned toward her holding a small, yellowish envelope. Hattie's face was a strange grey-

ish color—the color she always turned when cables came.

“It’s . . . it’s one of them long-distance telegraphs, Miz Janet.” She held out the envelope as if it might explode.

Janet laughed at her and took the thing from her hand. She didn’t much like cables herself these days—but Bruce was always sending them.

She said, “Don’t be so silly, Hattie!” and ripped open the envelope.

And the first three formal words struck her like a bolt of lightning.

*Regret to inform . . .*

She was numb and all life had stopped and the universe was chill and God-forsaken.

She went on staring at the dingy rectangle of paper with the pasted-on strips of whiter paper—and the words kept coming out of a blurred darkness in odd little groups of three—*Regret to inform . . . Very gallant officer . . . Flight-Commander Bruce Elliot . . . Regret to inform . . . Killed in action . . . Distinguished Flying Cross . . . Over enemy territory . . . Regret to inform . . . Killed in action . . .*

She couldn’t straighten out the groups. She didn’t try. But the words kept striking up at her like flaming, triple-edged swords. And she couldn’t move. She was helpless and cold and rigid, and irrevocably lost in a freezing desolation.

Through the coldness Hattie’s voice came from far away.

“Miz Janet! Miz Janet!” It was saying the words over and over again. “Miz Janet—he ain’t . . . he ain’t . . . Oh, Miz Janet! . . .”

The voice died away. Or the coldness had killed it. She tried to move. She wanted to move away from here. But to where? *Regret to inform.*

She felt a pressure on her arm. Regret to inform. The pressure increased and she obeyed it. Her feet stumbled, but they moved.

Regret to inform. Something was pressing her downward. And Hattie's voice, hoarse and harsh and trembling, was piercing vaguely through the coldness. She could hear what it was saying. It was saying:

"There, there, chile! There, there, chile! Jest you lay right down there, chile. . . ."

She found a voice, and a little part of her will which wasn't frozen. "No!" she said, and wrenched herself free with violence. "No!" She threw out her arms stiffly in front of her to ward off contact.

She began to walk, to run.

It was dark in the little stable-yard. The stall-doors were tight shut and the light was out. And the clammy flakes of snow were drifting thickly down. She stumbled across to the door she needed and fumbled blindly for the bolt and heard an answering, heavy movement from within.

The bolt slid back under her fingers and the door opened and she stepped into the darkness and pulled it shut behind her. The sweet live smell of hay and horse stung her nostrils and she was touching reality again.

McTavish moved, and she put out a hesitant groping hand in the darkness. His soft, enquiring nose nuzzled it gently—and she felt life—like a terrific voltage of electricity—surge through her. A queer strangled sound burst from her throat and she had to fight for breath. She stumbled forward toward the warm looming bulk and locked her arms about its neck.

He stood absolutely motionless, and she laid her head against his iron-hard, velvet-softness and sobs began to shake her and the tears came.

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## Chapter Two

THE house by moonlight wore a melancholy face. Its walls, which must once have been white, were greyish and mottled, like the cheeks of an old woman.

The window which faced the drive had only jagged edgings of glass, like glittering teeth in an ogre's mouth—and at the corner nearest it, the skeleton of a monster vine thrust wild long tentacles up to prod at the warping shingles of the roof. Beyond, two lanky palms shot to alarming height and cast rigid, misshapen shadows across the weed-rimmed walk which led to the porch.

The colored boy giggled. "Sure is spooky up here, Miss!"

He led the way along the path and up the porch steps and Janet followed wearily. She was very tired, and her jodhpur shoes were hurting her and she was uneasy about McTavish out there in the old box-stall with no hay and only that musty ancient scattering of bean-straw bedding: she couldn't even be sure that the box walls were free of nails and splinters.

The colored boy set down the blankets on the porch-rail and found a key and bent over the lock of the door and went on talking.

"Sorta rusty." He struggled ineffectually with the lock. "Ain't bin nobody livin' here f'r a lo-ong whiles, the Greek says."

The key turned in the lock at last with an angry grating,



and Janet pushed past the boy and opened the door. She was depressed, and wondering whether she had made a colossal mistake in coming here at all.

She said, "Where's that candle?" and realized that she had been far more brusque than she intended.

"Right here, Miss." There was a flicker of red light as the boy struck a match, and then a leaping yellow light as the wick of the candle caught.

"You take it, Miss," he said. "I'll git the blankets."

Janet took it. She held it high and turned to survey the room. It was long and high and well proportioned. There were beams across the ceiling and strips of paneling interspersed around the walls with flaking white plaster. At the far end was a wide stone fireplace, blackened with the smoke of old fires. There was dust everywhere, thick grey layers of it, and cobwebs hung in elaborate festoons from the beams and glittered in the corners. In an untidy island, to one side of the fireplace, was grouped a strange assortment of furnishings, chairs and a small table or two and a cane rocker and an oaken highboy—and, beneath the window in the wall to her right, the wall which faced the driveway to the stables, was something which looked like a bed and which was shrouded beneath a dust-encrusted sheet of canvas.

The colored boy was back now, with the blankets in his arms. "Tain't bad in here, is it, Miss?" He smiled at her broadly, bent upon cheering her. "Be lots better when we gits the dust off everything."

Janet crossed to the hearth and set the candle down upon the mantelpiece in a little pool of its own tallow. She said:

"What's your name?" and looked out of the window for a moment, toward the stables.

"Sherlock," the boy said. "Sherlock Robinson, Miss. But they calls me Sherry mostly."

He pulled the canvas from the bed and a thick cloud of dust fogged the air and got into Janet's throat and made her cough. She went to the broken window by the porch and breathed in the clean soft air of the night.

Sherry, mumbling about dust and dirt and spiders and a future house-cleaning, dragged the canvas to the porch door and through it. The dust still danced in the yellow candle-light, but it seemed to settle quickly and Janet walked over to the bed and felt it and found that it was not bad at all. It was a divan with box springs and an inner-spring mattress, and its faded upholstery was dry and clean.

Sherry came back and picked up the blankets and unfolded them and revealed sheets and a towel and a chintz-covered pillow and even a pillow-slip.

"Why, Sherry," she said, "this is luxury!"

He beamed delightedly. "The pillow was *my* notion, Miss!" He began to separate the things as if to make up the bed, but she checked him.

She said, "I can do that, Sherry. Perhaps they'll be wanting you back at the Inn."

He giggled. "The Greek said five minutes, Miss. And he was meanin' it. Maybe I should . . ." He stopped suddenly, and darted abruptly across the room to where a curtain hung across a doorless archway. Mumbling to himself, he pushed the curtain aside and disappeared.

Janet began to make the bed, wondering where he had gone. She heard doors opening and shutting and then a rushing of water and then, after this had ceased, another rushing which ended in a titanic gurgle.

Sherry came back through the curtain. He smiled broadly at her and a gold eye-tooth twinkled warmly.

"Everything's functional, Miss!" he said triumphantly.

She said, "Thank you, Sherry. Thank you very much." She found a half-dollar in the change in her pocket and gave it to him.

She thought for a moment he was going to refuse it, but he took the coin shyly and dropped it into his pocket and mumbled thanks and then stood, shifting his weight from one foot to the other.

Janet looked at him. "Hadn't you better get back?" she said. "I can manage now, really."

But he still hovered: he wanted to say something, and couldn't find the words. He made two false starts, and then it came with a rush. He said:

"That's a mighty fine-lookin' horse, Miss! I was wonderin' if it'd be 'greeable to you if I was to come down around the stable in the morning so's I could git a real look at him. Maybe I could help you some—sweeping or . . . or straightenin' up . . ."

Janet found that she liked him very much. "Of course you can come down, Sherry! You like horses?"

His brown eyes grew wide and shone. "*Like 'em!*" he breathed. "What kinda horse is that horse, Miss? Is he a pleasure-ridin' horse?"

Janet repressed a desire to laugh. "No, Sherry. He's a racehorse—a special kind of racehorse—what we call a steeplechase horse." Watching the bronze face she thought that if the eyes opened any wider they might fall out of his head.

"Jeepers, Miss! One of the jumpin' kind—and you ride him!" He gazed at her in shining awe. "That'll be two of 'em, when Mr. Olivant . . ."

He stopped abruptly—and as he turned a startled head

toward the window which had no glass in it, Janet heard a man's voice shouting in the distance.

"The Greek!" Sherry said, and hurtled across the room and pulled open the door and was gone.

Through the glassless window, Janet heard the flying feet go thudding down the pathway and then crunch on the gravel of the driveway and gallop on in diminuendo toward the Inn. She felt, suddenly, very lonely.

She spurred herself to action, and looked around for her bag; the old duffel-bag of Bruce's which she had strapped across the saddle on the long ride up here from the train. It wasn't anywhere in sight, and she remembered, with a twinge of tired annoyance, that it must still be down in the stable-yard. Well, it didn't make any difference anyway, because she had to go down again to see Mac; the more she thought about him and his quarters, the less she liked the whole business.

She walked over to the door and opened it, forgetting the candle, still burning steadily on its perch over the fireplace. A quick gust of wind arose somewhere in the smooth curvings of the hills and set the dry bushes which lined the path to rustling and sent little stones skipping on the graveled driveway to the stables. The sagging fronds of the palm trees whispered, and in the room the dusty curtains billowed eerily and the candle flickered and went out.

The breeze died as suddenly as it had come, and through the new silence there drifted to her ears, from the little cluster of white buildings which made up the Inn, the thin sweet music of a stringed orchestra playing *tzigane* music.

Janet sighed, and closed the door behind her and set out along the path toward the driveway with weary resolution. In the moonlight the little plateau seemed chill and bare and the stable buildings black and gaunt and threatening.

On every side of her the big hills rolled and angled: they did not seem Rockwell-Kentish now, but sick and foreboding, like a horribly beautiful background by Beardsley.

Her feet crunched on the gravel of the drive and she trudged on, with every step growing more and more doubtful of her wisdom in coming here—especially coming here in the way she had, alone with her horse, and at night, and without any preparation for his comfort. It had seemed an awfully clever scheme this morning—to get a foot in here, so to speak; to come at such a time and in such a way that they could not refuse her shelter for the night and could subsequently be induced easily enough to give her permanent quarters. . . . But now—now she wasn't so sure; she was less sure with every moment.

She was almost at the corner of the first barn when she remembered something which brought her to a halt; a halt so sudden that for an instant she stood with one foot ridiculously poised in air.

What was that the colored boy had said? What was it? "*That'll be two of 'em,*" he'd said—and he was talking not only about horses but about steeplechasers! And then he'd said, "*when Mr. Something . . .*" and then he'd stopped because the Greek had been calling him.

She couldn't remember the name he'd used. But that didn't alter the fact that he had seemed, now she came to think about it, to be referring to the prearranged arrival of a man and a horse!

So the mysterious "old man" the Greek kept referring to wasn't so chary, after all, about having his stables used.

She walked around the corner of the barn very slowly. Was this discovery good or bad? Did it mean that she was more, or less, likely to be able to stay here with Mac?

She was in the middle of the yard now. From the box

at the far end, on her right, Mac's head and neck protruded. There was a dogged, enduring look about them, she thought. He did not move at the sound and sight of her, except that his ears, which had been slanted back, rose erect.

She thought, I wonder about that stall! There's just enough of that old bedding to save his knees—but those walls . . .

And then she remembered the flashlight she had put into the duffel-bag as an afterthought. Why hadn't she thought of it before, when she was putting Mac away? She supposed she must be very tired: somehow, her mind didn't seem to have been working properly ever since she'd left New York.

She shook her shoulders impatiently. She said, loudly, "All right, Mac—be with you in a minute," and went purposefully across to the spot where she could see the bag huddled against the wall. It looked black and ugly in the moonlight.

She bent over it and fumbled with the cord which fastened it and undid the knot and thrust her arm down into it and found the flashlight.

"Now!" she said aloud. It seemed to do her good to talk.

She strode toward Mac and felt for the bolt on the lower half of his door. He turned his face to her, the twist of his mouth more evident than ever.

She said, "Lousy in here, isn't it! Worse than that train." She found the bolt and slid it back. She swung the door open and pushed her way in and pulled it shut behind her.

The horse didn't move. "Get over, Lummo," she said, and put her hand on his sleek neck and pushed. He moved grudgingly, and a sigh came from his nostrils: it managed to sound bored and exasperated at the same time.

Janet went on talking. "I know," she said, and switched on the flashlight, being careful that the white beam shouldn't shine in his face and startle him. There was a dry, musty smell from the bean-straw.

"You ought to see my shack," she said, and began to flicker the light over the walls. "It smells better than this, though. . . ."

She cut herself short. She had seen, in one swoop of the beam, three dark and sinister points. She went closer and felt them with her hand. They were the projecting points of nails, and they were flank-high, exactly where they could do the most damage.

"Damn it!" she said, and set her teeth firmly to keep from going on.

McTavish sighed again, this time with a little cracking of his nostrils. "Yes, I know," she said, and went past him to examine the rear wall. She found more nails and some really dangerous areas of rough and splintery boarding.

She didn't trouble to look any further. She switched off the flashlight and scratched her head with its nobbly end. She said, "Can't leave you in here, old boy!"

She pushed past his flank to the door again and went out, bolting it behind her. She stood irresolute for a moment; then decided that before she did anything else, she had better just have a look at the other boxes. She switched the flashlight on again and flickered it aimlessly around the two rows of blank facing doors, all with their upper and lower halves shut tight against the moon. At the farthest corner of its sweep, the beam touched the little, humped-up porch of what must be the tackroom. She swung the light back, and in doing so saw its glistening reflection in a window which was clean and bright.

They must have been getting ready for this man Whozis.

Damn him, anyway! She switched off the light—and then immediately switched it on again. If the tackroom had been made ready, perhaps other places had been prepared as well.

The light fanning before her, she marched toward the tackroom: the first thing, obviously, was to see how much preparation there had been.

She climbed up the three steps onto the little porch, her jodhpur shoes clumping in tune with her mood. She saw a padlock—a bright new one—on the door and did not try it but pressed her nose against the cleanly glittering window and held the torch up beside her ear and peered. At first she could not see anything, but after varied maneuverings of her head and the light, it suddenly became clear, like a scene upon a little stage.

It was a small place, but scrubbed and shining and furnished. There was a strip of checked linoleum on the floor, and a cot neatly pillowed and covered with a blanket vivid with red and white squares. And there was a little chest of drawers, and a saddle rack, and a big cane chair, and a little table beside the cot, and a calendar hanging on the wall, and a big trunk of dark leather with gleaming fittings of brass and large upon its exposed flank the initials R.O.

It was all neat and orderly and very, very clean—and it all annoyed her with its smug leering at her predicament. She shifted the light a little, and then her head a little more and went on looking and saw other things, notably three suitcases which were ranked beside the trunk and bore the same initials.

“R.O.,” she said to herself and then, “Ro!” It sounded like a phoney Egyptian god in a comic strip. It sounded as smug as it looked! Mr. Ro was apparently going to be very comfortable.



Wait a minute, though: if Mr. Ro's quarters were so finished, what about the housing for his horse?

She thought: *I'm losing my grip, that's what I'm doing!* She turned and ran down the steps and opened the first door next to the tackroom and jerked the flashlight around until its white, spreading cone of light shone into the stall.

And she saw—tidily, smugly stacked—bale upon bale of straw and hay, one pile against each wall. And she saw sacks—a great many sacks—which contained, obviously, grain and bran and possibly other foods. And the light of the torch hurt her eyes, because the walls had been newly whitewashed.

He's really done himself proud, has Mr. Ro, she thought, then suddenly remembered the name which Sherry had said. Olivant, it was.

She turned away, leaving the door of this Golconda wide behind her. She went to the next door and opened it and turned the light into it and once more saw the reflected glare of whitewashed walls. But here was no storeroom; here was a habitation for the best of horses; a big, roomy box, with new hayrack and manger, and shining water bucket, and smooth and nailless and splinterless walls, and a thick, crisp, yard-deep bed of gold-gleaming straw.

"Oh!" Janet said aloud. "Oh, Mr. Ro!" Again she felt better for talking. "Thank you, Mr. Ro!"

She knew what she was going to do, and she felt good; she felt almost happy, with a baseless feeling of achievement such as she never had from bigger things. She unhitched the shining new water bucket from its hook by the door and walked across the yard to the faucet by the dilapidated hitching rail. She began to swill the dusty metal and found time to wonder about the achievement feeling: maybe it only came in one size or something, so that little

things, like the impudent liberty she was about to take, seemed big—and big things had to suffer by comparison and fade into nothingness.

She filled the bucket, and carried it back to the box with an aching arm. She struggled with it and hooked it onto its catch at last, with only a very little spilt upon her jodhpurs and shoes.

She went out of the box then, and into the feedroom next door. She pulled the flashlight out of her pocket and switched it on and propped it on a sack and grabbed a shining pitchfork from its corner and broke the wires upon one of the hay-bales and pried off a packed armful. The scent of it rose sweetly and she felt an almost sensuous delight in Mac's forthcoming pleasure as she carried it into the box and stuffed it into the hay-rack.

She collected her flashlight from the feedroom and went across to Mac. He was standing again with his head and neck thrust out as he had been when she had first come down here from the house. His ears didn't rise this time at her approach, and, although she couldn't see it, she felt that the sardonic twist of the lip was more marked than ever.

"You're a nit-wit," she said to him. "What d'you think I've been doing—trying to fool you?" She plucked his halter from the hook she had hung it on and slipped it over his head and his ears came forward.

She said, "Getting more interesting, isn't it?" and led him across to Ro's box and walked him into the nearly knee-deep straw and turned him around and slipped the halter off.

His head was high now. He snorted loudly and his nostrils went *fa-rupp*. She patted him on the neck and slipped out, bolting the lower half of the door behind her and then

standing to watch him as, moving his legs in the deep new straw with delicate care, he circled the box once, thrust an enquiring nose into the hayrack, approved, teased out an enormous mouthful and began to munch.

"That's better, isn't it?" she said, and he turned his head to look at her. There was hay sticking untidily out of his mouth and he seemed to be smiling.

"Good night, old boy," she said. "See you in the morning."

She crossed the yard and picked up the duffel-bag and slung it over her shoulder and plodded back toward the house. She was very, very tired and her feet were sore and aching but she wasn't unhappy any more. The achievement-sense was too strong for her to be unhappy—and the hills, as she looked at them, had lost the Beardsleyish feel. They were awesome still, but they were beautiful and protective.

She turned off the drive and went up the weedy pathway and onto the porch. She opened the door and it creaked hospitably. She kicked it shut and dropped the bag and found matches and lit the candle and was at home.

She stripped off her clothes and piled them on a cane chair which she removed from the island of furniture. She took soap from the bag and the towel from the end of the bed. She went through the curtained archway and found a surprisingly large and undecayed bathroom and spent some minutes sluicing dust away but was soon back in the big room and ready for sleep. She set the candle down again upon the mantel and pinched out the flame and turned toward the bed. In the moonlight which flooded the room now it looked comfortable and safe and inviting. It looked *snug*. She smiled as the word came into her head—but insisted to herself that it was the right word.

She walked over to the bed and cast a last look about the room. She couldn't see the dust in the soft silver light which seeped through the windows, and the cobwebs which festooned the beams above were graceful and glittering.

She pulled back the covers. She was just going to slide into snugness when something about the trees and the moonlight as seen dimly through the dirt-misted glass of the big window upon the far side of the fireplace caught her attention.

She hadn't looked through this window yet, as she had out of the others. She studied it again, and decided that all she would see through it would be the driveway and the inn buildings and the hills, almost exactly as she had seen them from the window upon the nearer side of the hearth.

So there was no point in crossing the dirty floor in her bare feet and going to this window and looking out; no point at all, especially as the air which eddied gustily in through the broken pane on the porch was cold upon her tired body.

But she went just the same. She looked out through the filmed glass and found, a little incredulously, that here was a new vista—an improbable and magical vista. The Inn was there, true enough, exactly to her left. And the driveway was there, right in front of her. But straight ahead, between the trees which made a semi-circular background to the Inn and the bushes which, nearer to the stables, bearded the steep side of the little plateau, she could see straight down into a little cul-de-sac of a valley she had never imagined was there. She hadn't guessed that the hills hid any place like this, thick with vegetation and untouched by any sign of humanity or humans' habitation.

It was a sunken stage, with the moonlight pouring down upon it like a heavenly lime. There was grass there, and

blossom-laden bushes—and in the center was a tree-covered knoll, and at the foot of the knoll a winding, shining little stream which moved and sparkled.

It was too good to be true, and she couldn't escape the feeling that in a moment she might be horrified by the sight of a piece of canvas slipping, or a batten hideously protruding, or even a worried stage-manager racing across and twitching a tree into line.

She went on staring—and the feeling of unreality faded and she took herself to task for having harbored it: because a sight was unexpected and very, very beautiful was no reason to doubt its truth.

A shadow moved on the knoll, at the edge of the trees. Something was coming out of the shadow and on to the bright, moon-washed slope. In strange, breath-catching excitement, she strained her eyes to see.

She saw—and blinked the eyes in doubt. Moving steadily down toward the glittering stream was a large bobcat—and almost upon its heels, stepping with dainty and comradely confidence, was a small deer!

Motionless, holding her breath as if she were within scent or hearing distance and might with any sound or movement frighten them, she watched while, side by side and with less than a foot separating their two bodies dark in the silver light, they drank from the stream.

At almost the same instant they raised their heads from the water—and then, as if startled, leaped the stream and, this time with the little deer bounding in the lead, flashed out of Janet's sight beneath the hill.

She shook her head slowly, in wonder and not disbelief. She turned away from the window and went slowly back to the bed and climbed into it.

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## Chapter Three

A SUNBEAM slanted through dusty glass and fell warm and bright across Janet's eyelids and she waked from a dream about Ro.

It had been a vivid dream, frightening and full of worry. But she couldn't remember any of its details except that there had been an earth-shaking clatter and they had all rushed out to see and been confronted with a chariot drawn by eight white horses harnessed abreast. Ro, standing alone in the chariot and somehow commanding the snorting, highly conventionalized steeds with only one pair of golden reins, was a gigantic figure, dressed in robes which might equally have belonged to Flash Gordon or a mediaeval emperor and wearing upon his hawklike head a vast towering mitre which had looked like the Pope's.

That was all she remembered properly, although it had been a long and circumstantial dream. The rest was now a haze of fear and worry in her mind, with only the certain knowledge that its theme had been the absence of any room in the stables for the interloper McTavish.

She sat upright in the bed and shook her head to clear the gauze of sleep from it and tried to laugh at the dream and didn't quite succeed and looked about the room to see how it was by daylight. She was appalled momentarily by the dust and the bareness—and then, taking herself in

hand, saw that the place had very simple and very definite possibilities.

She looked at her watch and saw that it was after six and bravely threw back the covers and swung her feet to the floor. If she were really to look after Mac and get him ready, being late in the mornings must not be countenanced. She picked up her clothes in an armful and took the towel from where she had hung it and marched through the archway to the bathroom.

Ten minutes later, clean and refreshed and fully dressed, she picked up her jodhpur shoes and carried them over to the window on the far side of the fireplace; the window from which, last night, she had either seen, or dreamed that she had seen, the unbelievable little valley.

It was there. She hadn't been dreaming. The dirty glass tried unsuccessfully to dim the wild and gentle and astonishing beauty, even greater now than it had been by moonlight. It was really there, lovely and solitary and utterly improbable. It was down there below her window—the sort of place you sought for all your life and never found. She hadn't been dreaming—and the deer and the bobcat had been there too. Birds soared and wheeled above the dark green carpet of tree-tops, and the stream glittered at the foot of the knoll, and the remnants of morning mist still hung, lacy and purple-fringed, upon the edges of the high surrounding hills.

She kept on staring as she slowly strapped her shoes, and then stood upright and moved nearer to the window, almost touching it. It reached from ceiling to floor, a solid, immovable sheet of grimy glass. She moved this way and that, trying to see more of the little valley, wondering if it could be the cul-de-sac it seemed, or whether there were not, around the humped, projecting shoulder of the nearer

hill, a continuation which might run for mile upon winding mile.

She sighed. She was going to explore—and the thought of exploration had brought sharp memories of Bruce. She turned away from the window and marched across the room to the porch door and presently was walking quickly toward the stables, her shoes crunching on the gravel of the drive. The early air was keen yet soft, and the slanting sun was warm upon her shoulder and the hills seemed friendly now in their vast, smooth roundnesses. She became conscious, all at once, that she was hungry.

Mac's head was sticking out of Ro's box, but it was not turned toward her. His ears pricked forward, his whole attitude one of interested attention, he was staring at a figure which leaned against the door of the opposite box and stared at him; a small, lithe, square-shouldered figure rather strikingly clad in yellow-tan trousers and a turtle-necked sweater of electric blue which lent a strange and by no means unpleasing tint of green to the bronze face above it.

"Hello, Sherry," Janet said, and he levered himself away from the wall and came toward her. "You look very smart this morning."

"It's my day off, Miss." He seemed preoccupied and abnormally grave.

Janet said, "Hi, Mac!" and patted the horse's out-stretched neck and fumbled with the bolt of the lower door.

Sherry stood at her elbow. "There's a lot of trouble, Miss!" He sounded scared, and Janet took her hand from the door and looked at him. He said:

"The Greek was down here, Miss! He sure was sore about you puttin' your horse in Mr. Olivant's place."



Janet smiled. "I thought somebody might be angry, but it had to be done, Sherry." A thought struck her, and the smile faded. "He didn't think you had anything to do with it, did he?"

The boy's eyes opened even wider. "Gosh, no, Miss!" He seemed relieved by the thought of how much worse things might have been. "But he was certainly aggravated at you, Miss!"

Janet shrugged. She felt annoyed, rather unreasonably, and a little frightened. She opened the door and went into the stall and talked while she was stripping off the light day-sheet which was all she had been able to bring for McTavish.

"Don't worry, Sherry," she said. "I'll fix everything when I go down to the Inn for breakfast. Think I'll be able to get some?" She folded the sheet and hung it over the door.

"Oh yes, Miss. Sure, Miss—if you don't mind meetin' up with the Greek!"

Janet looked into the water-bucket and saw that it was nearly empty. She said, "But I want to see him, Sherry." She unhooked the bucket and stepped out into the yard and set it down and shut the door behind her.

Sherry, his eyes shining and all the worry gone out of them, made a movement as if to pick up the pail, but checked himself.

"Want to fill it for me?" Janet smiled at him: she was recognizing symptoms.

He had picked it up before the words were out of her mouth. "Can I take it back in there, Miss? An' hang it up for him to take a drink?"

His tone was hushed and awe-stricken and tremulous with excitement. Janet suddenly realized that she knew now what they meant by "bated" breath. She said:

"Of course you can!" She turned away, very casually, towards the feedroom. "Rinse it out well, Sherry," she said over her shoulder.

"Yes, *ma'am!*" His voice came eagerly back to her, and she heard his footsteps, light and pattering like a boxer's, as he ran across the yard.

She made for the hay-bale she had broken into last night and pried two leaves of it loose and then paused. She thought vaguely about hanging, and sheep and lambs, and made up her mind. She took from the pocket of her jodhpurs the old penknife of Bruce's which she always carried. She opened its one rusting blade and crossed determinedly to the pile of sacks which looked most like grain and cut the string of one.

In a corner, smug and shining, a quart measure nestled in a pair of brand-new feed tins. And it was a grain sack she had opened. She seized the measure and began to dole out a vigorous breakfast into the topmost tin.

She heard Sherry's footsteps, slower and heavier now, approaching the box next door.

"Just go in quietly, Sherry," she called. "Don't make a lot of noise—but let him know you're there." She grew nervous and went quickly to the doorway, the measure still in her hand.

Sherry was unfastening the door, the brimming bucket held strainingly away from his body by the other hand. He beamed at her, the gold tooth gleaming in the sunshine.

"Okay, Miss!" he said. "Okay." He opened the door. "Here I come," he said to McTavish—and his voice was the voice of one who would never have to learn anything about the way to speak to horses.

"Brought you a drink, Mister," he said, and heaved up the heavy bucket, without spilling a drop of its brimming

content, and hooked it to its place. McTavish, his lip lifted, looked at this new human stonily for a full moment—and then, as the boy, standing rock-still to face him, put out a daring and tentative hand, lowered his head and gently nudged the bright blue shoulder.

Janet watched them from the doorway. “All right, Sherry,” she said. “That’s fine! Come on out now.”

The boy came out. His round face was greyly pale, but not with fear. His eyes were wide and shining: he was a little copper Galahad who had seen his Grail.

Janet stood and watched him. She couldn’t help it. She said, “Like him, Sherry?” and pretended not to be awaiting an answer.

“He looks . . . he looks *brave!*” said Sherlock Robinson.

Fifteen minutes later, Janet approached the Inn’s white buildings with a determined stride which she desperately hoped would conceal the trepidation inside her. Back in the stables, while McTavish finished his breakfast, a radiant Sherry was working lustily, taking nails and splinters from the walls of the original box-stall they had given her, and cleaning out the ancient bean-straw and substituting a whole bale of Ro’s new bedding: the boy seemed in some sort of seventh heaven where Greeks didn’t exist, or if they did could easily be dealt with by magnificent, super-human young women who owned and actually sometimes bestrode The Horse!

Janet smiled ruefully, hoping she wouldn’t let him down. Or herself or Mac, if it came to that. Or . . . or Bruce. She quickened her pace and went past the big, shuttered windows at the end of the main building. There had been no sign of life at the back—but she supposed there must be someone up and about besides the Greek. She

wondered when he got any sleep—and then found herself rounding the building and seeing its front for the first time by daylight.

There was a green lawn and there were flowers, many flowers. The main building was a short-ended L, but the white frame for the coloring of grass and blooms was completed by a little bungalow upon the far side. Janet hadn't noticed it before. She looked at it now with pleasure, and wondered what lay behind its close-shuttered windows.

She turned up the pathway which cut across the lawn to the front entrance on the verandah. A man in a white shirt was bending over a bed of orange and yellow cannas. He was a big, thick man, and he was carefully cutting the flowers with a huge pair of gardening scissors. Beside him in a gay riot of color lay a little mound of already amputated flowers. He must have heard her feet upon the path but he didn't look up. Crouched by the earth of the bed, he was regarding the growing blooms intently, his head upon one side.

Janet stood and watched him for a moment. She wondered who and what he was. She was waiting for him to turn his head and look at her, but he didn't.

She said, "Excuse me—could you tell me where to find Mr. Lenardos?" and hoped she had the name right: Lenardos seemed to be what Sherry had said.

The man didn't turn at once even then. He had chosen another flower and was carefully cutting its stalk. He laid it gently upon the pile by his foot, and straightened his back slowly, and slowly turned to face her.

"Right here," he said—and as he spoke she saw that it was the man himself.

He was a much bigger man than she had thought, and his eyes, instead of being coldly and impersonally grey as

she remembered them, were vividly blue. She wondered how old he was—and decided that he might be anything from thirty to forty-five. He had thick black shiny hair and heavy dark brows and a strong-featured but indeterminate face.

She said brightly, "That was silly of me. I didn't recognize you. Good morning."

She wasn't sure whether he murmured an answer to the greeting or not, because at that moment, through some open window above them on the verandah, there burst from a radio the metallic cadences of a news-announcer's voice.

"... and so," it declaimed, "we find in Greece yet one more example of the horrors of existence under the Nazi rule . . ."

Janet moved uneasily, closing the ears of her mind. The brazen voice and its topic seemed to have sucked the warmth from the sunlight and the color from the grass and trees and flowers. She started, thinking Lenardos had made a sudden movement; then realized that he hadn't stirred. She was disproportionately relieved when within the house an invisible hand turned off the voice with a contemptuous, disappointed click.

Lenardos stooped and gathered up the flowers he had cut, taking them gently and surely in his big hands.

He said, "Was there something you wanted to see me about?" and faced her directly for the first time.

"I understood that you wanted to see me," Janet said.

He stood there looking at her. The great bunch of bright delicate flowers should have looked incongruous but didn't. He said:

"Who told you that?" and then inconveniently didn't say any more.

Janet looked at him. She decided to smile. "I'm starving," she said. "Could I possibly have some breakfast? Then we could talk about it while I'm eating."

He went on looking at her. "I'll see what we can do," he said, and made a little movement with his head which sent her walking up the steps to the verandah and through an open doorway into the bar-room. She knew he was close behind her but couldn't hear his footsteps, even on the boards of the stairs and porch.

The bar-room looked different in the morning light—bigger and not so comfortable. It was very clean, though, and she realized that the Greek must make others rise as early as he did. She hovered indecisively—and he walked past her without so much as a glance. On the end of the bar was a pile of newly-cut giant daisies, and he laid the cannas he carried gently beside these and then pushed through a doorway which must lead to the kitchen and was gone.

Well! she thought, and then smiled rather wryly at herself and looked about for somewhere to sit and chose a table in the corner which was close to a window and the arched entrance to the dining room. It was a small table, bright with spotless cloth and shining silver, like the ones in the dining room beyond. It looked cheerful and homely in contrast to the other furnishings, which were Spanish and heavy and, in this early daylight, faintly depressing.

She pulled out a chair and sat down. She wondered miserably what she was going to do—and then, in one happy instant, saw her way clearly.

She smiled to herself and pulled from her pocket the check-book and pen she had put there on her way up from the stables. She made some quick calculations—and then wrote a check, leaving out the name of the payee.

She had just finished when she heard a movement and looked up to find a colored waiter approaching the table. He was bigger than Sherry, and much blacker. Looking past him, she saw that the Greek was back at the end of the bar: he was moving the piles of flowers, and a row of vases was ranked before him.

The waiter said, "Breakfas', ma'am? The chef says to say we can't do much, ma'am. But he says we c'n make out some awrange juice 'n coffee 'n ham 'n aigs 'n toast if that'll be suitable, ma'am."

"Suitable!" said Janet. "It's symphonic!" She smiled. "That's exactly right! Thank you very much."

The man went. She glanced at the check she had written and then over at the Greek. His back was toward her, and he was setting flowers in the vases, very carefully, very deliberately. She picked up the check-book and the pen and walked across the room and stood beside him.

As if unaware of her presence, he chose an orange-colored blossom with great care and stood it in an empty vase and began to take daisies from the pile and set their whiteness around the color. She looked at the two vases he had finished and felt no surprise that the balance and blending of the flowers was both charming and in some strange way unusual.

"Mr. Lenardos!" she said.

"Yes?" He was looking at the half-filled vase with his head tilted slightly on one side.

Janet drew a deep breath. She said, "I understand you were annoyed because I put my horse in the box which was ready for somebody else's."

"The old man's rented the whole stable to a friend of his." Another daisy was set delicately into place. "I only let you put your animal in the other stall last night because

it was late and we're so far from any place." The blue eyes hadn't moved once from the flowers.

"Listen, please," said Janet. She hoped the desperation she was feeling wasn't apparent in her voice. "I want to stay here, Mr. Lenardos. I want to stay here very much indeed. And nobody's using the house where I slept—and the man who's coming seems only to be bringing one horse. . . ."

The Greek had finished the third vase. He lifted it and put it gently aside and pulled an empty one toward him. He said:

"The old man rented the whole stable to this Mr. Olivant." It was final.

"Who is 'the old man'?" she said—and hoped the curtness she had deliberately injected into her tone would have the right effect.

"Mr. Fowler," said Lenardos calmly. "Mr. George Fowler. He owns this place."

"Is he here?" said Janet.

"No."

"Will he be back before this . . . this Mr. Olivant comes with his horse?"

"I don't know."

She set the check-book down on the bar with a slap and ripped off the check she had written. She was losing her temper—and knew that she mustn't. She said:

"Look! I've done all the damage already that I can do in a week. I've used a bale of this Olivant's straw, and part of a bale of hay, and I've opened a sack of grain and used some of that. But I won't use his box any more, and I won't need anything else. Now, here's a check to cover a week's rent for the place I'm sleeping in and the box my horse is in: it also covers the straw and the hay and the grain—



at very much higher prices than Olivant paid for it in bulk."

She broke off before she was through with her piece. The man had turned his head to look at her at last. The vivid, impersonal eyes rested their gaze on her face for a moment; then, without any change or acquisition of expression, flicked down to the check.

He said, "Well?" and started on the flowers again.

"Here's what I'll do," said Janet, resisting an impulse to moisten her lips. "I'll stay here, with my horse, until Mr. Fowler comes—or this Olivant. And I'll try and make a deal with one or the other of them."

"With the old man," said Lenardos. His hand reached out and picked up the check. "Fill that in to George B. Fowler and it'll be okay."

Janet said, "Thank you," without meaning to. She took the check and filled in the name and laid it on the bar again.

"But there won't be anything doing," Lenardos said. "May as well tell you that."

"Thank you." She was deliberately sarcastic this time, but entirely without effect. Lenardos had gone back to his flowers.

She turned away and walked briskly back to her table, arriving at almost the same instant as the waiter with her breakfast. She threw one last baleful look at the Greek and his precisely moving hands and decided that the prospect of exploring the valley was too exciting to be marred by worries. She ate her breakfast and enjoyed it.

And an hour later she was riding McTavish down the little overgrown trail which she had found on her way back from the Inn. It was immediately opposite the big window—and it must lead down into the improbable little amphi-

theater of a valley. It was a very narrow trail, and very faint, and looked as if it hadn't been used for years.

It was tough going. As it dipped over the sharp edge of the hill, it became very steep and full of jutting outcroppings of rock, and there were places where Mac had to brace himself on stiffened forelegs and go sliding down, inch by inch, almost on his rump, while she lay back in the saddle with her head nearly touching his quarters. But she couldn't turn back, and she didn't have much time to worry; she was too busy avoiding the branches of the scrub trees which peppered the side of the hill and kept trying to brush her out of the saddle.

Then the grade eased, very suddenly—and she was there. Mac, after a moment of stepping about to stretch his cramped hind legs, stood suddenly still and with ears forward surveyed the scene before him, turning his head slowly as if to take it all in.

Janet laughed at him and slapped him on the neck.

"Like it?" she said. She felt light and free and dangerously happy. It was all here, exactly as she had seen it—only now, in the slanting early sunshine, the feeling of stagniness was gone: it was all vividly real—and twice as lovely by reason of the reality. The stream ran across before them, almost at Mac's feet. It was broader and swifter than she had thought. It was a little river. It sparkled in the sunshine, and made happy, gurgling noises. Upon the far side of it, past a fringe of willows, the knoll sloped gently up to its covering of thick tall trees; they merged gradually into the sheer side of a hill which was almost a mountain and which curved around, to her left, to meet the hill behind her in a cliff-like formation barring egress to everything except the little river which disappeared between narrow, towering walls of rock.

She was fascinated. She watched the stream as it disappeared, fussing mightily, between the rock walls. That was where it went to—but where did it come from? She looked to her right: the hills didn't meet here, they merely leaned toward each other, leaving a gap perhaps fifteen yards wide but certainly no more. She knew there was a gap, because the stream came rushing out from between the walls of hill. But she couldn't actually see the gap, because it was veiled by a dense green thicket of willows and other waterside trees which suddenly, only a few feet from the cleared space where Mac stood, sprang up on this side of the stream as well as the other.

She turned Mac and put him into a walk and made for the thicket. The hill pressed them always closer to the shelving edge of the water and soon there was no dry ground to travel on and McTavish was ploughing knee-deep through a tangle of fern and his hooves were plopping delightfully.

Then they were in among the willows and she had to ride with a forearm up to protect her face from whipping branches. McTavish snorted and splashed steadily onward and in a minute they were through the gap and the hill had fallen back a little and there was room to walk on dry land between its foot and the water.

High above the sun was bright and the sky was hazy blue—but it was still too early for direct light to come down into this deep-cut passage between the great hills on the far side of the stream and their lowering smaller brothers beside her. She felt vaguely oppressed. McTavish broke jerkily into a trot: perhaps he didn't like it either.

And then she saw that, about a hundred yards ahead, the hill on her right seemed to end abruptly in a sudden, dark promontory of naked rock. It stood proud and foreboding,

and jutted out across her vision so that she couldn't see the country beyond.

As they approached she saw that to get around the rock they would have to go into the water again. She eased down to a walk, but there were no willows here and it was a simple matter of splashing.

McTavish was still over knees and hocks in water when she saw what the rock had hidden and felt the sun warm upon her face again. She let her reins hang loose and stared. The nearest hills had not ended at the rock: they had swung to the right with military precision, while the stream, and the bigger hills on her left, merely curved erratically in the same direction.

The narrow corridor had turned into a fat and smiling valley; and she blinked and looked again. The colors were difficult to separate—the silver glimpses of the little river, the lettuce-green of the foliage along its banks; the rich dark ochre of the hills, the emerald of the trees which topped them . . . the strange embroidery of colored mosses which carpeted the foothills.

McTavish, still hock-deep, had been motionless beneath her while she gazed—but suddenly she was aware of a fluid feeling encroaching on his immobility. It was as if, having been stone, he were being transmuted slowly into jelly. And then, almost before she realized what he was thinking, his legs began very definitely to buckle.

"Hey!" She snatched his head up roughly. "This is no swimming pool, you bum!" She jabbed her heels into his flanks and thrust him up the shelving bank.

Then she turned her head, staring at the valley again. She felt that she could look at it and look at it and never grow tired of looking.

She was brought sharply back to herself. McTavish

wouldn't stand, nor even walk. He twisted and jiggled beneath her and broke into a choppy canter and then was so unlike himself as to put in a sedate but acutely uncomfortable fly-jump.

"What's the *matter* with you?" She was peevish.

He snorted, then ground his teeth with the curious rumbling sound which had always made Bruce laugh so much. . . .

She felt suddenly lonely. She didn't want to look at the valley any more. She gave Mac her full attention.

"Oh," she said. "I see what you mean."

Lying almost straight in front of them, only curving slightly to follow the bend of the stream, lay a smooth, almost mile-long stretch of flat, firm, semi-sandy soil which Providence must originally have put there for hooves to gallop along. It separated the green-fringed river-bank from the moss-carpeted foothills with a thirty-foot-wide, undeviating strip of tan-colored earth whose length and breadth were bare of growing things and seemed unmarred by dips or holes or rises or any of the traps for running horses with which Nature will, usually, besprinkle her private, unspoiled galloping grounds.

She felt a surge of justified happiness which dispelled the melancholy of a moment before. Everything was going right. There was a stable here, and a place for her to sleep. There was beauty here, and peace—and a lonely, perfect place for Mac to run. And there was sunshine from a blue sky over everything, and somewhere Bruce knew what was going on and was smiling approval. . . .

She took a much shorter hold on the broad plaited rein of the heavy snaffle, easing the leather slowly and cautiously up through her fingers. She could almost hear Bruce's voice. "*Never rush him into a gallop—or you'll have more*

than you can handle! . . . Never go forward on him quickly—or grab his head too sharp! . . . Ease him into it, honey—ease him into it!”

Mac went into a violently uncomfortable canter, throwing down his famous fifth leg at almost every other stride and jarring her so that she felt all the teeth in her head might be loosened. She sat down to it manfully and gave him a little more rein and the canter smoothed out into a steady gallop and very slowly she eased herself forward in the saddle and up off it to stand in the stirrups without either relaxing or slackening her tight, steady pull at his mouth.

He went fast but smoothly—at a gallop which was something better than a hunting pace and something less than racing. His hooves thudded in the cushioned going with a pulsing *clumpetty-clop-clumpetty* sound which seemed to belong to the live warm air and the stream and the growing things. The blood surged through her body as if the same heart were pumping for the pair of them, and tears made by the speed of their going misted her eyes, and the ache of the steady, unyielding pull at her arms was more pleasure than pain. Beside her, the foothills streamed by in a kaleidoscopic pattern of color. . . .

Twice he tried to break and flatten out, raking forward to stretch the iron neck and almost pulling her over his head; but each time she snagged him back without trouble and the curve came back to his crest and the rhythm of the pace stayed steady and unbroken. She felt sure and strong and part of the power beneath her and yet proudly in control of it. She felt detached from the world and yet completely in tune with life. And, without conscious thought, the command of this power and beauty made her

feel for the first time in her life that she understood music and was part of it. . . .

Time did not exist—but through the faint mist of moisture in her eyes she saw that now the stream was curving more sharply and that the trees which had hitherto kept to the distant flanks of the hills were sweeping down upon each side, to join forces some distance ahead and cut off the ride in a thick living barrier.

She decided to pull up—and again could hear Bruce's voice inside her head. *"Don't stand up and pull like a flat-race jock! . . . Sit down and throw your weight back and take a good haul—and then throw his head away! . . . Then repeat the dose! . . . If he's ever really running with you—which God forbid—don't pull at all, throw his head away, right away!"* . . .

Darling Bruce: he'd always underrated her a bit, and he'd never quite believed how different Mac was with her! She sat down in the saddle and threw her weight back and pulled and then went forward and left the rein slack.

"Ste-ady, boy!" she said. "Hold it now!" The pace checked a little—and she pulled once more and then eased, and the gallop became, in swift and simple succession without any jarring of fifth legs or broken gaits, first a canter, then a trot, then a sedate but springy walk.

She relaxed, leaning forward to pat the neck which was now damp with sweat and had a fine white line of foam upon it where the rein had chafed the hair. She said:

"Attaboy! That was swell, wasn't it? And you're a gent!"

She twisted in the saddle, looking him all over. Except on the neck and slightly in the stifle, he was hardly sweating at all. And they must have come nearly a mile at that clip! He was a whole lot fitter than she'd thought. The blood

still raced through her and she felt, for the first time in weeks, a definite happiness.

"I'm hotter than you are!" she said, and pulled out a handkerchief and patted at her forehead—and just at that moment saw the break in the willows, and then the bridge.

It was a makeshift bridge, but it looked strong and solid though it sagged most markedly in the middle. Tree-trunks had been driven into the river-bed as piles and across them strong timbers had been fixed.

She pulled up and stared at it and some of the happiness left her. For the bridge argued habitation—and many of the wheel tracks and hoof-marks on the ride ahead were new. They didn't go past the bridge but over it to the faint road which wound through the trees on the other side. On her side they ran straight ahead, churning up the smoothness and disappearing where the trees and underbrush seemed completely to bar the way.

She abandoned the idea of crossing and shook McTavish into a trot and went briskly on. If there were habitation, she might as well find it.

The barrier proved to be further away than she had thought—but on the way to it she found still another sign of man. The trees—a little forest of them now—were right down to the edge of the ride, and peering into their shadow she saw the thin, shining lines of a wire fence and a glimpse of flat meadow at the foot of the now receding hills. She stood up in her stirrups and looked the other way, across the stream, and tried to see what might be there but couldn't for a while because of the height of the willows. And then there was a gap—and she saw that, stretching away immediately from the far bank, were fields which were obviously under cultivation.

She came to the end of the wide trail. It was perhaps half



a mile from the bridge, but it ended in just as complete a deadlock as she had thought. The trees grew close together, and the undergrowth was dense, and right across the ride, cutting it off sharply like a knife, was a dense thicket of brush.

She rode close to it—and realized that, in spite of its appearance, it couldn't be natural, for the wheel- and hoof-tracks went right up to it. She took Mac closer still and peered over the top and saw the ride continuing, and the tracks. And she saw now that it was an admirably camouflaged gate. At one side, where a slim tree served as a post, there was a gleam of metal which turned out to be a padlock and chain.

She thought for a moment, and decided to explore further. What sort of farmer was it who loved this place so much that he tried to hide even the fact of his farm? Or was he a farmer?

She looked at the imitation thicket again and saw that there was no cross-bar within six inches of its four-foot high top. She turned Mac around and took a shorter hold and he began to canter choppily, knowing what was in her mind.

*"He's no handy hunter, Jay! . . . He's a racehorse. . . . If you have to pop him over anything, try and make sure it's not timber. . . ."*

She cantered back along the ride for nearly fifty yards.

*"Give him plenty of room, honey. . . . And work yourself down in the saddle. . . . And take a good firm hold of his head and keep it: he isn't any show-jumper. . . . Just let him go his own way! . . ."*

It was strange how well she remembered, without even having to think.

She pulled up, and turned. McTavish snorted once—and

then went into high gear with a forward leap which threw her back and then snapped her forward with such tremendous force that if she'd had time she would have thought her back was broken.

But she remembered. She sat down, very tight, and didn't let his head go and put some of her weight against him.

The trees streamed by her, and the thicket rushed toward her and everything went too fast. She closed her eyes involuntarily—but she went on sitting tight: she was frozen, and she didn't relax her grip, or the pull of her hands against the steady, fearsome pull of the equine head. There came a smooth, effortless, soaring lift beneath her—and a tssting sound which even through her queer paralysis she recognized as that of Mac cutting three inches of the brush at the top of the thicket. . . .

She had thought, she realized afterward, that there would be a jolting shock as he landed; a shock far greater than that of any hunter or show-jumper. She braced herself for it—and then found that already they were landed and galloping on. Her eyes were open again now, and she was ashamed of herself for having let them close. She felt a quick surge of elation mingled with relief—but she knew they were going too fast.

She spoke to Mac, and threw her weight back and hauled at him and then eased forward and let his head go. She was gathering herself for the second pull when she found that it wasn't going to be necessary: he came right back to her and in a moment was walking with sober elasticity.

"That's the boy!" she said. She patted his neck and felt very proud of herself and then laughed, wondering why all horsemen—even Bruce—always seemed to think that because a horse happened to have raced he must necessarily

be too much of a handful for any woman, however competent she might be with all other kinds.

She looked about her. All around, the trees were thinning, and she could see the stream again on her left, while on the other side, through the wire fence, were ever-widening glimpses of pasture-land.

It was very quiet: the sounds of Mac's feet and the stream, the chittering of birds in the trees and the sudden little scufflings in the undergrowth were not so much breakings of the silence as integral parts of the morning.

But a real sound came to break this thought; the metallic tinkling of a bell. It came from her right—and grew steadily louder.

They emerged from cool green shade into hot sunlight—and found themselves almost face to face with a cow; a large black and white cow. It stood upon the inner side of the fence and regarded them calmly with dark and impersonal eyes.

McTavish glanced toward it; then away again. Janet fished in her pockets and found a cigarette and lighted it. The smoke tasted wonderful. She wondered how far she had come from the Inn, and how long she had been. A hundred yards ahead, the trees closed in again, almost joining the stream once more, and she decided that she would see what lay the other side of them.

She was about to shake Mac into a trot when there was a small thundering of hooves behind them and he started sharply, veering around toward the fence. Upon the other side of it, galloping happily up to investigate them, came a stocky bay draft horse. He pulled up, whickering welcome. He was fat and sleek and pleasant to look at as he jogged along beside them, completely ignored by McTavish.

Janet laughed. "Mac," she said, "you're a snob!" and he broke into a trot which she did not check.

Even before they reached it, she saw that the wooded belt ahead was very thin, and through it she caught a glimpse of buildings. She pulled down to a walk and they came soberly out from the trees and through an open gate into a white-fenced yard which extended from the pasture on one side almost to the edge of the stream on the other.

It was a workmanlike yard, dominated by the barn which faced the gate; a cream-coloured barn, with a low-sweeping roof whose shingles were green. Before it a wagon rested on its shafts and against one end of it was tilted the tongue of a harrow. Bougainvillea climbed like flame over the eaves, and heaped against one wall was a manure pile clouded thinly with flies. Chickens strutted and squawked and from somewhere came a satisfactory gobbling of pigs.

But there was no sight nor sound of man. Wondering at her curiosity, Janet walked McTavish slowly across toward the barn. There was a vast evergreen tree in the corner nearest the stream, and through its foliage she thought she saw another roof. She was going to turn toward it when, from somewhere close at hand, came the sudden barking of a dog and then a quick, harsh, wordless command in a human voice.

It was a strange voice, high-pitched and gabbling—but it was a man's. She didn't like it. She almost pulled Mac up and turned him back, but the curiosity was too much for her. She rode around the end of the barn—and, even before she could pull him up, he halted abruptly.

His nose was almost touching the flank of a cow; a small and fat and dun-colored cow who was being milked. At her heels sat a large, lean dog, with the head of an Airedale

and, beneath his scrubby coat, a suggestion of Dalmatian spotting. The milker was on the far side of the cow and Janet could see only the naked knobbly knees which gripped the bucket.

His hackles standing, the dog snarled—and around the end of the cow, the milker stared suddenly up at her.

If she had been on foot, she would have started back in frightened amazement, and as it was, she felt herself recoil in the saddle. The face which looked at her was covered with a tangle of yellow-white beard which cascaded over a brown and scrawny chest; a mane of grey hair, far more luxuriant and longer than her own, fell over naked shoulders; from beneath brows astonishingly black a pair of small and bird-like eyes looked into hers with the sharp, wild surprise of an animal.

She didn't know what to do. She went on staring—and after a motionless instant the strange, wild figure rose from its squatting position in one smooth movement and seized the battered pail and was making off, the mongrel running beside it, at a loping stride. It was naked except for a piece of drab material twisted around its stringy haunches like a loin-cloth. It ducked behind the far end of the barn and was lost to her sight.

She looked at the cow, and it moved placidly away, the bell at its neck sounding tinnily. She looked in the direction which the weird milker had taken, but neither saw nor heard a sign of him. She turned McTavish slowly about and, still wondering and desperately curious, walked him back into the yard.

She headed for the giant tree and the building it concealed. She wondered if she would find any inhabitants—and whether, if she did, they would know about the furtive and hairy cowman.

She was only halfway across the yard when she heard the voice. It was harsh and metallic, and it came from the building behind the great tree. She couldn't catch any of its words, but it held an urgent, nagging note. And it wasn't the milker's voice.

She lay forward in the saddle, with her face almost on Mac's chest, to avoid the low-hanging branches of the evergreen. There was a little gate in the fence behind it—and a house behind the fence. It was a small brown house, half-hidden by the weeping greenery of the willows in which it nestled. The voice had ceased, and she could hear the noises of the stream.

She eased Mac gently through the narrow gate and was in a patch of sunlight. She squinted up her eyes against the glare and looked at the house more carefully. A porch was facing her, but in the depth of the shadow which it cast she couldn't see whether the doors and windows were closed or open. At her right was a neat patch of kitchen-garden, but everywhere else shrubs and flowers and plants were richly haphazard.

A rocking chair on the porch began to swing squeakily as a grey cat jumped out of it with a plop, stretched lazily, and came slowly down the steps to meet them, its tail high and graciously waving.

"Hey, Minnie!" shouted the voice. It was very close now, and Janet started. She stared around—and saw nothing.

"Spring's here, Minnie!" The sound was piercing and strident and inhuman.

The cat, marching with slow delicacy, began to weave in and out between Mac's motionless forelegs. He put his head down to watch it and did not move.

"Hey—Minnie!" The shout was startlingly urgent—and Janet saw the cage which hung, half in the shadows, at the

nearer end of the porch. Swinging gently on a crossbar was a large green parrot.

Janet began to laugh. "Hello, Minnie!" she said—and set off a stream of volubility.

"Hey, Minnie!" squawked the bird. "Where are you, Minnie? . . . Hey there, Minnie!" It punctuated each batch of words with a short, rattling laugh, and at last settled down to a steady chant of, "Hey there, Minnie, hey there, Minnie! Spring's here, Minnie—spring is here. . . ."

The cat was rubbing against Mac's near fore now, and, with his head down still lower, he was blowing softly at it through his nostrils.

Janet felt extraordinarily light-hearted. "You shut up, Minnie!" she said. "You're getting your dates mixed!"

She looked up at the sun: it was climbing high now, and she ought to start back. She could come here again, she thought. She would come here again.

"Look out, cat," she said, and picked up the rein.

Mac turned slowly, raising each foot with exaggerated care. They pushed through the narrow gate again and under the green umbrella of the tree.

The squawling voice followed them as they came out into the sunlight which flooded down over the yard.

"Looks like rain, Abel," it yelled gloomily.

Janet found herself glancing quickly up at the cloudless sky—and she began to laugh again.

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## Chapter Four

SHE had left her watch behind in the early-morning rush, but she knew by the sun that it was after three when she finished in the stables. She had sponged Mac and groomed him, and picked out his feet and given him his big meal of the day—hoping she wasn't going too heavy on the grain too quickly and reproaching herself for not having really found out how Benjy had been feeding him. And she had run a soapy sponge over her saddle and bridle and washed the bit and girth. Sherry had been gone when she returned, but the original box-stall was nailless and splinterless and the golden new straw was deep and thick all over its floor and the dusty surface of the yard had been smoothly raked and Ro's box thoroughly cleaned.

Sherry was a jewel: if they let her stay here, she'd start a fifth-column campaign to get him as a stable-boy. . . .

She pulled herself together sharply. What did she mean by thinking *if*? They were going to let her stay here! She was going to *make* them let her stay here!

"I hope," she said aloud, as she walked out of the yard. The sun was hot on her back, and her thigh muscles hurt and her seat was sore, and in his box a glossy, comfortable McTavish ate steadily and hungrily. She was beautifully tired and the injured hand ached a little and she thought with equal longing of a tall cold stinging drink and a deep hot stinging tub.



The drink won, because she didn't want—she definitely did not want—to go back, as tired as this, into the long and bare and dirty room and look at the cobwebs and the dreary island of dreary furniture, and have to walk to and from the bathroom on tiptoe to avoid kicking up the dust.

She plodded down to the Inn and around the end of it and up the verandah steps and into the bar. She glanced at the bungalow on her way, but the windows were still shuttered. She wondered if the Greek would be about, and was rather relieved that he wasn't. There was a colored bartender she hadn't seen before—and no one else.

She liked the bartender. He was happy and smiling, but he hardly talked at all. She wondered what she would drink and started to order a Tom Collins and then changed her mind because she remembered suddenly what she and Bruce had drunk the day they had found this place. It had been a very hot drive and their mouths had been like leather—hers from excitement, Bruce's from winning the Sorrento on McTavish.

"A Cuba Libre, please," she said—and the man made it for her and she took it over to a table by the door and drank it slowly and smoked a cigarette and looked out at the flowers and soon felt much more able to face the dirty house. She walked happily back toward it, much quicker than she had come.

But on the steep little path up to the porch, doubt assailed her. She still didn't want to go in. Perhaps she should have had another drink? She quickened her stride and ran up the steps and opened the door—and halted on the threshold in astonishment.

There were no cobwebs. There was no dust. The glass of the windows was clear and shining. The bed had been made. There was no island of furniture. The broken pane

of glass in the window which looked out onto the porch had been neatly backed in with clean white pasteboard. The floor was no longer grey but brown and gleaming.

She stepped slowly inside and closed the door gently behind her. She found it difficult to adjust herself. She looked around with deliberate calmness, and was smitten oddly by a sense of stiffness.

It was caused by the furniture, which was spread, more or less proportionately and in roughly the proper places, all about the big room. But every piece of it was set squarely to the angles of the building and to each of its fellows: the tables and the chairs and the battered little writing-desk and the wood-box by the hearth and the odd-looking hat-stand by the door and the vaguely Monterey settee—they were like soldiers who had been posted in their positions, awaiting inspection.

Almost without thinking she began to wander around, pulling this piece sideways, thrusting that one further back, setting the other just a little off center. . . .

It didn't take her long. It hardly took her any time at all. And the big place was clean and eminently habitable. She flopped down upon the settee and looked at it.

And then she saw the coat-hanger which was hooked onto one side of the mantel. It was wrapped about with sheets of newspaper which dangled to the floor—and the only reason she hadn't noticed it before must have been because it was so big and ungainly and improbable.

She crossed the room and peered beneath the paper and found the grey-blue knitted suit which she had brought in the duffel-bag and shaken out and hung over the chair which had been by the bed.

And she found something else—a note pinned to the

hanger itself; a note which covered half a sheet of paper with a carefully-rounded and flourishing script. She read:

*Dear Miss—*

*Have shined up your front room some. Will do kitchen tomorrow if poss-*

*Very truly—*

*S. Robinson.*

She had taken the hot and stinging tub—and a cold shower after it. She had rested in delicious half-sleep for an hour—and now, with the soft silk of clean hose and underthings against her skin, was getting into the knitted suit. It was growing dark in the big room, for the sun was going down behind the hills, but she had already done her hair and fixed her face, which was beginning to darken a little from the gentle burn the morning ride had given it.

She felt good: without the haunting fear of difficulties ahead about staying here, she would have been happy. She wished the Greek's "old" man would hurry home, and she could have it all over and settled.

The suit seemed unwrinkled and sat smoothly and comfortably. She took a candle and lighted it and went to the bathroom and peered at herself in the long strip of mirror over the wash-basin and was pleased with what she saw—except that the last cleaning seemed to have shrunk the material a little, lending rather more emphasis than she liked to excellent outlines.

"Sweater-Girl, huh?" she said to the mirror. But she had nothing else to wear, so there was no use in worrying.

She blew out the candle and went back to the main room. It was full of shadow now, and she walked over to

the big window and looked out. The glass was very clear: she felt that she might stretch out a hand and find it wasn't there at all.

The hills were black against a sky of purple and crimson—but as she watched, the colors faded; first to orange and gold, then to grey, then to a momentary violet tinge which chilled the whole valley into darkness.

She was hungry. She set the candle on the mantelpiece with matches ready beside it, and found her way to the door. Her high heels made the little path down to the driveway seem steeper than ever. She descended carefully and turned toward the Inn.

There was only one car—a big, dark sedan—in the parking place behind the kitchen, but perhaps it was too early for much business. She walked around the end of the building, making for the verandah.

She halted suddenly. Facing her, the bungalow was lighted up, and the venetian blinds were open over its windows and the French doors at the top of the three steps stood wide.

She had a hunch—and played it. She crossed quickly in front of the Inn verandah and made for the little house. As she drew nearer, she could see through the open doors into a living room. She saw bookshelves, and a desk, and a great cabinet which might be some super sort of radio, and a big easy chair with a shaded lamp throwing light down on its emptiness.

Her heart beating uncomfortably fast, she ran up the three steps and knocked upon the wooden framework of the screen.

Nothing happened—and she knocked again, more loudly. She heard an inner door open, somewhere out of her sight—and then, without there having been any further sound,

a figure loomed behind the screen. It was very close to her, and it cut off the light so that she couldn't see it clearly. It was a tall, a very tall figure—and it seemed to be wrapped from head to foot in a light-coloured, voluminous robe which made her think involuntarily of half-remembered words like *Friar* and *Capuchin* and *Dominican*.

It seemed to be staring at her through the screen. It startled her and she couldn't find anything to say.

"Lookin' for somebody?" it said—and the voice dispelled all fancy. It was a man's voice, light and rather high-pitched; both hard and good-humoured at the same time.

She said, "For you, I think. . . . Are you Mr. Fowler?"

The figure moved a little, drawing to one side so that the light wasn't cut off any more and she could see it.

"That's me," it said. "George B. Fowler. What can I do for you, young lady?"

She saw that the monkish robe was a checkered dressing-gown of thick, pale silk, and she saw that the man it covered was an old man, almost painfully thin, with a small, grey head and a small, much-lined face. He towered, but he was bent and shrunken. She thought that once he must have been almost a giant.

"So y're lookin' for me," he said before she could speak. "That's fine—fine! Don't have too many people doin' that—not nowadays." He pulled open the screen door. "Come right in!"

She stepped into the room. She was exceedingly curious. The gesture and air with which he bowed her in were nothing less than courtly, but his speech and accent—even somehow his choice of words—verged upon the tough. She was either going to dislike him intensely, or very much the reverse.

He shut the screen gently and walked past her. He stood

by a chair and invited her to it with the grace and certainty of a pre-Revolution nobleman. She found herself seated and looking up at him.

"My name's Janet Elliot," she said. "And I'm very glad you've come home, Mr. Fowler."

He smiled at that—and she knew she was going to like him very, very much. He said:

"Whad d'you say we have a little drink? You eaten yet?"

She smiled back at him and shook her head.

"Me neither," he said. "Martini?"

She nodded again—and the tall form shuffled through an inner door and left it open. She saw part of a miniature and sparkling kitchen, and waited patiently, listening to the noises of bottles and ice and stirring. She was happy and excited: she could handle Mr. Fowler: she and McTavish would stay!

He came back with a pitcher and glasses and set them on the side-table and brought her a drink. She sipped at it and found it good and said so.

He drank from his own glass. "They tell me I'm a Grade-A mixer," he said, and tasted again. "Not too bad."

"It's marvelous!" Janet said. "D'you want me to tell you why I'm here?"

He sat in the big chair and looked at her. "And why you *think* y're glad I'm home?"

She laughed. "I don't think any more. I know I am."

He stood up again, to bring her a cigarette box and then to bow over her with a light. He started to speak; then checked himself as there was a sound outside and the screen opened to admit the Greek—who didn't come any further into the room, but stood where he was, a dark, heavy figure. His eyes flickered glances first to Janet; then to the old

man; then to the pitcher and the glasses. He didn't say anything.

Mr. Fowler stared at him. "No, Eddie!" he said.

Lenardos looked at the watch on his wrist and said, "Five minutes, huh?" and was gone again.

"Eddie's burnin'!" The old man chuckled, and picked up the pitcher and refilled both glasses.

Janet said, "Does he ever smile?" and then immediately wished that she'd kept silent.

Mr. Fowler chuckled again, and then was grave. "I've seen him," he said. "At sorta peculiar times, though."

Janet saw that, when he wasn't smiling, there was something hard about his mouth. She looked quickly at the small, dark eyes and couldn't read them at all and found herself reminded of the blank bright blueness of the Greek's.

"He's a good boy, Eddie!" The dark eyes weren't looking at her but off into space again and a past time. "A very good boy!" He suddenly smiled again, and Janet felt happier. "To me, I mean—and that's the only way I judge people."

Janet said, "There isn't any other way, is there?" and hurried on past this banality. "Mr. Fowler: shall I tell you what I came to see you about?"

He was folded up in the big chair again, with one long thin leg draped over the other beneath the robe. He was looking at her steadily, and now she didn't know whether he was smiling or not.

He said, "It wouldn't be anything about a horse, would it? . . . An' a place to keep it?"

She still didn't know whether he was smiling. She said:

"That's not fair! You knew all the time, and didn't say anything!" She leaned forward in her chair. "Mr. Fowler, I'm not going to bore you with a long sob-story, but I ter-

ribly want to stay here, with my horse. I'll pay—and I won't be much nuisance to anybody. Won't you please say I can?" She wanted to say a great deal more, but checked herself.

He went on looking at her, but he didn't say anything for a long time. She began to feel afraid again; there was an awful uncertainty in the air.

"Miss Elliot," he said at last, "if it was only my business—if it was my business at all—I'd say go to it!" He paused. "But it ain't my business; it's the Professor's business."

Janet clutched at the one word in this which she didn't understand: the others were all too clear.

"The Professor?" she said. "I don't understand. I thought a man called Olivant . . ."

The old man cut her short. "That's him, Miss Elliot. He's a friend of mine. An' I don't have many friends these days—not what I'd call *friends*. And he's a peculiar sorta feller. An' I let him have the stables—on the strict understandin' that nobody else was in 'em."

"But Mr. Fowler," she began—and broke off as the screen-door opened again to admit the Greek. He carried a small tray which was covered with a napkin, and without word or glance he took it through into the little kitchen.

The old man looked at Janet in smiling resignation. "That's that!" he said. "Bed. Had a long day. . . . Orders from Doctor Lenardos—if y'get what I mean. . . ."

Janet stood up. She said:

"Look: if I could stay until Ol . . . until Mr. Olivant arrives—can I do that?"

He smiled at her. "I'll be sore if you don't."

She said: "Please listen, Mr. Fowler. What I mean is, if Mr. Olivant would agree to let me stay, would it be all right with you?"



"Positively!" said the old man—and then turned as Lenardos came in from the kitchen and stood heavily just inside the doorway.

"Okay, Eddie, okay!" Mr. Fowler sounded testy. "Miss Elliot's just goin'. Be right with you."

Janet moved toward the door. She thought she'd better say something, and tried, "I hope I haven't kept him too long, Mr. Lenardos," and was conscious of the Greek muttering inaudibly and of his eyes flickering a glance over the Sweater-Girl outlines.

The old man strode past him and held open the screen.

"Good night, Mr. Fowler," she said. "And thank you for being so nice to me."

The smile softened the hard mouth again. "That's easy!"

"And you'll let me stay—and see if I can persuade Mr. Olivant?"

"Just try an' go!" The smile was warmer than ever.

"Good night again." She held out her hand, and it was grasped by long, fragile fingers whose grip was surprisingly strong.

She saw the smile leave the lined face, and noticed with a pang which surprised her that he looked old and ill and worried.

"Maybe the Professor won't be along f'r a week or so. . . . But I ought to tell you there prob'ly won't be anything doin'!"

She went out through the screen-door. "Well, we'll see," she said brightly, and ran down the steps.

But she didn't feel bright: she felt a sick apprehension.

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## Chapter Five

IT WAS a bad night. Although she was so tired, she didn't sleep well. She kept on waking, worried and frightened by dreams which she couldn't remember. Twice she got out of bed and went to the big window and looked down into the little amphitheater, as if to satisfy herself it was still there. She was half asleep each time she did it, but each time, when she climbed back into bed, she was wide awake and sick with worry in case she should have to leave this place.

She was down at the stables by six-thirty, tired and apprehensive and headachey, and very, very stiff. She was slightly cheered by the unexpected sight of Sherry, busily wielding the rake over an already spotless yard. He wore his black working trousers this morning, but still the high-necked sweater of electric-blue. He smiled at her and made light of her thanks for his work in the house and protested about the money she gave him. He told her, a little fearfully, that he had already been into Mac's box and "sorta cleaned up around": he seemed to think he had taken unprecedented liberty in daring even to open the stall door, and beamed delight and relief when she was pleased and thanked him. He filled the water bucket for her and put the amount of hay she showed him into the rack and watched with grave and learning eyes as she doled out a small meal of grain and set it aside. His absorbed and

passionate interest did her good, and she thought for a while of him instead of herself and her troubles. She didn't speak to him much, but kept thinking of little tasks for him to do—and finished with something which sent him several heavens higher even than he had been yesterday, when he had filled the bucket and taken it in. She took out her grooming tackle and then slipped the halter on Mac and stripped off his sheet and led him out into the yard: she looked at Sherry and held out the halter-rope to him casually.

"Just hold him a minute, will you?" she said—and while she did a quick job of equine toiletry, cast covert glances at the boy.

His eyes were shining like black-brown jewels. He held the rope in both hands and stood stiffly, with his feet together, almost at attention.

"He's taken a fancy to you, Sherry," she said.

But Sherlock Robinson did not even hear her. His eyes were on Mac's face, and his lips were moving: he was talking to Horse without sound. . . .

It was early shift for Sherry at the Inn—and he served her breakfast, which was as good as yesterday's except that she was not so happily hungry this morning. She saw the Greek once: he was carrying in an armful of flowers from the garden. She said good morning to him and he muttered a reply and disappeared, and after that she saw no one but Sherry, who hovered constantly about her table and seemed distressed when she didn't eat everything in sight.

She was finishing her third cup of coffee and smoking her second cigarette when she decided to ask him.

"Sherry—have you ever seen Mr. Olivant?"

He looked at her solemnly. "No, Miss. I jest cleaned up the stable and tackroom for him 'cordin' to orders."

She felt a little foolish. "Oh, I see," she said weakly.

He fiddled about, flicking imaginary crumbs from the table: he was anxious for more talk, but too polite to begin it.

She said suddenly, "Why do they call him 'Professor,' Sherry?"

He looked at her in bewilderment. "Couldn't say, Miss. I wasn't conscious they did, Miss."

She crushed out her cigarette and stood up. She said, "See you later, Sherry," and took herself out of the place and back to the stables.

She saddled Mac slowly and climbed stiffly aboard him and walked him out of the yard. He tried to turn into the little trail which led down the steepness to the amphitheater, but she decided not to let him. She was lost in a vague fog of depressing thought, and she didn't want to go down into the valley with it hanging around her—and she didn't want to gallop—and she didn't want to jump that brush-covered gate. She wanted to ride quietly along and unmuddle her thoughts and make some sort of plan for dealing with Olivant.

She rode a long way, winding downhill and uphill; through little valleys and across open pasture land; along dirt roads and the shoulders of paved ones. She walked Mac most of the way, but varied the monotony and eased the saddle-soreness with a long trot or two and once a canter. She aroused her sluggish mind sufficiently to take in bearings and landmarks which would prevent her being lost, but she couldn't make it find any plan at all for the Olivant obstruction. However much she drove it, it seemed just to keep on a circular track.

The sun was hot, but there were cool little eddyings of breeze. The country was green and the air was alive and the incredible hills rolled and angled around her. She found, quite unexpectedly, that she was feeling a great deal better; that Olivant, whoever and whatever he was, didn't matter so much. She pulled Mac up and looked at her watch and decided it was time to go home. She turned him and put him into a canter, giving him a friendly slap on the shoulder as they started off.

"Phooey to all of 'em!" she said—and he increased his pace a little but didn't try to break.

She was on a wagon-track which wound through several pasture fields and crossed three dirt roads in the process. She had come by way of all the fields, but now, as she stopped at the first intersecting road, she saw that by taking it she might make the way home shorter. She stopped Mac while she considered. He stood alert, with his head up and turned to the right. His ears were pricked well forward. He had heard something—and she heard it too. She couldn't understand the sounds—a deep murmuring of many voices, a constant jingling and rattling—and a steady, shifting, unrhythmic thudding which made background accompaniment.

Mac was very much excited about it, whatever it was. He stood still enough, but he was taut in every muscle, and trembling.

So the jingling and thudding must be harness and hooves—but there was too much of the noise for it to be caused by any farmer's teams, and there were too many voices. And the sounds were stationary. They came from quite a way off, somewhere on the road or near it but hidden by the outthrusting shoulder of a small hill which marked the

mouth of one of the little canyons which indented the whole countryside.

"Let's have a look," she said to McTavish and set him trotting toward the hill, his hooves beating a steady hollow tattoo on the packed-clay surface of the road.

As she drew near the shoulder which still obscured her view, the sounds grew louder. There must be a great many men and a great many horses. She was curious—but the obvious answer did not occur to her until, pulled down to a walk, she turned the bend in the road and found herself face to face with what seemed to be a whole regiment of cavalry.

They were resting. They lined both borders of the narrow road, encroaching onto the fields on both sides. The men were dismounted. Most of them were sitting or lying on the ground, but every sixth man or so was holding a little bunch of horses, and he was generally standing up, his charges shifting about and making the irregular pounding noise which had seemed background to the other sounds. They were tanned weatherbeaten men, all with the unmistakable stamp of the professional soldier. They were quick, neat, strong-looking men, and their horses were sleek and powerful and somehow like them, but with a curious look, blank yet intent, about their heads which she could not understand but felt she ought to.

There was a soft whistle from the nearest group—and she suddenly realized the gauntlet she must run as the faces were turned toward her. She was much too near to turn back—and the distance which she must ride between the two irregular lines seemed to stretch endlessly before her.

She wanted to laugh, but couldn't quite manage it. She sat down tighter and looked straight in front of her and rode on, hoping that the strange excitement she could feel

in McTavish's gait was not going to turn into any play which might be too awkward to sit. She wished desperately that the men had been infantry, or mechanized troops, or anything at all except what they were; then she would have at least been able to fortify her spirit with that inef-fable feeling of superiority which is given to the horseman over other humans.

She didn't have time to think any more. She was right in between the two lines now and she could hear more whistling, soft but extraordinarily embarrassing. She felt intensely conscious of womanhood and wished she didn't. She wanted to smile at them and couldn't. She knew she was blushing and hated herself for it and merely made herself more uncomfortable. And McTavish had thrown an exaggerated curve into his neck and was playing with his bit and literally prancing in his walk: the snobbish boredom with which he would pass any draft horse or hackney or even hunters—where was it? He was showing off—and he insisted on bouncing. . . .

"Hey, fellers!" came a voice. "Ain't that Seabiscuit?"

"Sure! But that ain't Red Pollard up—or is it?"

And more soft whistling . . . and many more faces turned toward her . . . and more wide, white grins. . . . And Mac *wouldn't* walk like a gentleman!

"Hey Beautiful—dis-mount!"

"Look out, Missy! He's gonna act up! He wantsta join the Army!"

She began to laugh—but her face was still flaming. And she wanted to look at them but daren't. . . .

"Elbows in! Heels down! Y're in the Army now! Chin up!"

The chorus was swelling. She was only half-way—perhaps not even that. . . .

"Throw out them chests! . . . let y'r irons down! Y're a soldier, not a jockey! . . . Give us a ride, Lady! . . . Hey, sister, ya lost y'r cart! . . .

A tremendous voice suddenly came from somewhere ahead of her.

"All right!" it bellowed. "*All right!*"

And that was all—but the voices died quickly, as if they had been simultaneously gagged. And there were no more whistles. Only the smiles remained, white against leather-brown.

She felt better. She rode on and passed the man who must have done the stentorian shouting. He stood by himself at the side of the road, between two groups of horses. He was a big, burly person, and on the sleeve of his blouse were many chevrons; he looked, she thought, like a picture she had seen somewhere called *Top Sergeant*.

She smiled down at him as she drew close and saw that he was looking up at her.

"Thank you," she said.

Teeth whiter than any showed against the dark crag of his face. He didn't say anything, but put his hand to his cap in salute.

The silence persisted as she rode on. She stole glances at the men and the horses. She was puzzled again by the strange look of blank intentness about the equine heads.

There was another curve in the road, this time to the left. It was marked by a clump of trees which hid everything the other side of it. She rounded the corner—and saw that she was at the end of the regiment. There were two bunches of horses here, and some men who held them. And there was also a large group of officers. They were gathered around a central figure, and they seemed to be looking at maps. The road came to a sudden end, cut off



by a ditch and a sloping bank from more pasture land. It was narrow, too, and she could see that the only way to get through was to squeeze between the two lots of horses. She slowed down, and Mac began to prance like a two-year-old. She stopped him altogether, but he wouldn't stand still: He shifted and caracoled like a fiery steed in a picture book.

The soldiers holding the horses looked at her—and so did many of the officers. She wondered whether she ought to push her way through or wait until the horse-holders thought to move their charges.

Mac had broken out now, he was so excited. Dark patches of sweat showed on his neck and shoulders. He made a half-hearted, showy attempt to stand up.

A thick, tall figure detached itself from the collection of officers and strode purposefully into the road. It had very shiny boots and a bristling mustache very white against a square, tanned face. The eagles on its shoulders looked important. It shouted at the horse-holders, and there was immediate movement, the bunch of horses on the right beginning slowly to separate into smaller parts and move out of her way. McTavish exhibited signs of wanting to stand up again and she let the rein go slack and slapped him sharply on the neck.

"Don't be such a *damn* fool!" she muttered. She was very angry with him and she was hot and nervous and uncomfortable. She didn't see the white-mustached officer approach: she only knew suddenly that he was standing beside her with a quiet, competent hand on the rein, close to the bit. Mac was resenting the strange touch—but he was still.

She said, "Thank you," and smiled.

He touched his cap in salute. He had nice eyes: they were

brown and clear and surprisingly gentle. He cocked his head on one side and looked at Mac.

"Wonderful type, ma'am," he said. "What's his breeding?"

"El Señor—Maid O' the Heather." Janet suddenly realized that although she'd heard this said, and read it, hundreds of times, she'd never uttered the words herself. She felt delightfully professional.

The brown eyes were looking at her again, bright with interest.

"Wonderful sire, El Señor." He looked at Mac once more. "Pity this fellow's gelded. How old is he, Ma'am?"

The road was clear before her now, but she didn't want to go. She said:

"We don't mention ages: he's getting sensitive." She looked around her at the men and the horses. Now she could show the interest she'd been feeling. "I had quite a shock when I ran into you people. I suppose it's silly, but no one seems to think of cavalry these days. . . ."

He smiled at her. "That's the papers, ma'am. And the movies—and all those experts on the radio. There's more cavalry being used in this war than there was in the last one. The Russians have a lot of cavalry—and they're using it, as the Heinies know to their cost. But we just don't happen to make the newsreels."

She liked him—and he obviously knew what he was talking about. She said thoughtfully, "Yes. . . . I suppose there are still jobs that horses can do better than machines. . . ."

"Exactly, ma'am. You'd be surprised what they're doing with cavalry—but not in the papers!" He laughed, then saw that she was looking at the horses again. "What d'you think of the way we're mounted?"

"Oh, I like them!" she said. "They're. . . . They're breeder looking than I'd have thought." She was struggling to explain to herself why their heads all looked so strange, so menacing almost.

"All three-quarter bred at least—and more actually clean-bred than you'd believe, ma'am." There was pride in the voice. "We've grown out of thinking blood's no good for active service."

In the nearest bunch of horses, a handsome bay suddenly turned his head toward Janet—and she saw in that one flash what it was that had been puzzling her. It was so obvious that it had taken her all this time to see it. On the bridle was no bright metal at all. Everything—all the buckles and billets and curb-chains and cheek-pieces—everything was of a dull, uniformly gunmetal darkness.

"Oh, I see," she said. "It's all black!"

The brown eyes of the man by her stirrup were puzzled for a moment; then suddenly smiled. "Looks odd at first, doesn't it, ma'am? But there's no glitter off it. We're in service order, you know."

There was a stir in the group of officers, and a voice called "Colonel Tiernay!" and he turned his head and made a little gesture with his hand and then looked back at Janet and saluted.

"Good day, ma'am." He glanced at McTavish who'd begun to fidget. "Good type! Wonderful type!" He stood clear and saluted again. The white mustache lifted at the corners as he smiled.

"Good-by," said Janet—and Mac plunged forward and she had to snatch his head quickly to keep him from breaking into a gallop. She jumped him jerkily over the ditch and up the bank.

"Fresh, huh?" she said to him—and let him stretch into

a stiff canter but had her work cut out to hold him down to it. Behind her, she heard the quick mellow notes of a bugle and eased her weight up in the irons and half-stood and turned around. But the trees, and the rise which she had already crested, kept all sight of the men and horses from her.

It was uphill most of the way home—and she kept Mac at a fast canter for perhaps three miles of the way, not easing at all on any of the grades. He sweated a lot, but there was no sign of distress in his breathing and he pulled steadily, ready and anxious always for a chance or sign which would let him really run.

She pulled him up, finally, at the edge of a field and the beginning of a narrow road she recognized.

"Now walk!" she said. "You old show-off!"

He walked—steadily enough, but briskly and fast. She wanted him to cool off before they reached the stables and checked him to a slower pace and kept as much as she could in the shade of the trees.

Except under the saddle, he was dry by the time they reached the junction of the roads just below the Inn plateau and she could see above her the garden and the buildings showing green and white through the darker green of the trees. She found her first cigarette of the ride and lit it. Against her will, she began to think of the man Olivant, and the trouble it seemed certain she was going to have. . . .

She sat upright suddenly and threw away the cigarette.

"We will stay!" she said to McTavish, and let him walk faster.

They went past the Inn and she waved to Sherry, who was beaming at her through a pantry window. They went down the driveway and turned into the stable-yard. She

was thinking: we have a week anyway, from what Mr. Fowler said. . . .

And then she saw the other horse, and Mac stopped dead inside the gateway, staring.

The horse was tied to the hitching-rail—and past him, at the other end of the yard, were a car and a canvas-covered trailer with its tail-board down.

She gazed at the horse. She didn't think anything, for a moment, except how beautiful he was. He was the most beautiful thoroughbred she'd ever seen. He was the most beautiful entity of flesh and blood she'd ever seen. Bruce had always told her that there was no such thing as a really black horse: she knew there was no such thing as a really black horse. But this one was black. He was black like shining jet, with the opacity of onyx beneath it. He was black all over, and the high-lights gleamed dark but dazzling off the rippling muscles of quarter and shoulder and second thigh. All of him was black except for the startling, almost heart-shaped shield upon the broad brow which was turned toward her, and the wicked, snowy gleam around the iris of the eye which regarded McTavish with light-hearted wariness.

He was a stallion, and he was young but in the full of his strength. He was very tall, a full hand higher than McTavish's solid sixteen; but there was nothing weak or spidery about his height. He was in exquisite proportion—and in almost racing condition. He turned his head in sharp irritation to bite at a fly upon his shoulder and the highlights flashed all over his ebony beauty as every muscle on his forehead moved beneath the silken skin.

She was lost in contemplation of him. From the tail of her eye she saw a man come out of the feed-room and walk toward her, but she didn't think of him at this mo-

ment, nor of whom he might be. He was just another human to whom she could talk about this horse. She said:

"He's almost too lovely to be possible!" and went on gazing, while McTavish still stood motionless, his head thrust forward as he too stared.

The black stallion arched his crest and whickered on a high, tremolo note which was so much like laughter that Janet found herself laughing too.

She stopped as suddenly as she had begun. She looked down at the man, who now stood close. He was a tall, lean man with a sort of insolent grace and he had a dark lean face beneath thick dark hair which was very neat at the back and temples but which waved surreptitiously upon the top of his head. She couldn't see his eyes, but he sounded as if he were talking to himself.

He said, "Where've I seen you?" and stepped back a pace or two and looked at Mac from another angle. He had a dark voice which matched the rest of him, and he wore light blue denim trousers and a dark blue shirt and huaraches. His face and throat and arms were deeply tanned.

He said, "I know. . . . Old El McTavish!" He came close and slapped Mac on the neck and looked quickly, as if a sudden thought had struck him, at Janet.

"Elliot!" he said. "Of course that's it! . . . Did you marry Bruce Elliot?"

She was utterly taken aback. No one, yet, who didn't know, had mentioned Bruce to her.

"He's my brother," she said stiffly—and then, when there was no reply, made herself open the attack.

"Your name must be Olivant," she said. "Mine's Elliot—as you already seem to know."

He looked up at her: she couldn't tell if he were smiling, or guarding his eyes against the sun.

"They told me," he said. "How d'you do?"

She threw a leg over Mac's withers and slid neatly to the ground, mastering the twinge which the movement gave to her sore muscles. She slid her arm through the rein and turned to face Olivant and found that he had moved away and was unhitching the rope of the stallion's halter.

The rope was new and the knot was stiff, and Olivant had to bend over the hitching rail to work on it. The corner of a white handkerchief was sticking up out of a hip-pocket in his trousers—and the stallion's head, very slowly, was being lowered toward it. There was a white, wicked gleam in the eye nearer Janet. She thought for a moment that he was going to nip at the seat of the blue trousers—and then was amazed as, with the utmost care and delicacy, he took the linen between his teeth and very gently eased the handkerchief from the pocket and raised the head again and held it high. His eyes seemed to be half closed and his lips were rolled back from the teeth which held his prize.

Olivant didn't seem to have noticed his loss. He loosened the knot and straightened himself. Behind him, the black head was held higher still, and the linen fluttered in the breeze like a flag. Janet, watching fascinated, was vaguely disappointed when she saw that the man had known all the time. Without fully turning to the horse, he held up his hand toward the black muzzle.

"Come on, Fagin!" he said. "Quit it, will you?"

For a moment the black head was held yet higher—but then, when the man didn't move but stood still with his hand upraised, it came slowly and reluctantly down, inch by inch, until the lower edge of the linen brushed Olivant's fingers and he closed them over it.

The teeth opened, the handkerchief went back into the pocket where it belonged, the crest of the gleaming ebony neck arched as it should—and the horse turned toward Janet and McTavish a face so blandly, sleepily innocent that she found herself laughing.

Without a word, or even a glance in her direction, Olivant led the horse over to its box. She watched them as they went, and was startled by the thought that, in some indefinable way, they were alike—except, of course, that the man was neither so black nor so beautiful.

They disappeared into the box—and she looked at McTavish, motionless beside her. He was staring after the vanished stallion, and on his long face was an expression of acid, weary contempt, perhaps slightly tinted with jealousy. The curl of his lip was so pronounced that she could actually see a yellowish gleam of tooth.

She patted him on the shoulder. "All right, old boy," she said. "You're still the best!"

She led him over to the hitching rail. His halter was dangling there and she fastened it around his neck and slipped off his bridle. She was unbuckling his girths when she heard a door close and the sound of a bolt being pushed home. She didn't look up, although she heard Olivant's footsteps as he came toward her. She took off the saddle and put it on the rail at the far end—and then knew that the man was standing near her and turned to him.

But he didn't say anything. He was looking at McTavish again—and leaving it all to her. She was suddenly very angry. She hated him. She said:

"Mr. Olivant: we have some business to discuss, I think."

He spoke then, but he didn't answer.



"He looks three-quarters fit," he said, his eyes still upon the horse. "Going to run him?"

She said, desperately, "Mr. Olivant: you've leased the whole of this stable. Will you let McTavish stay here? I'll pay you, of course."

He took his gaze from the horse and transferred it to her. Like the rest of him, his eyes were dark. Though they were intensely alive, with lights in them below the surface, they were just as unreadable as the Greek's—perhaps more so. She wondered how old he was.

He said, "I'm driving down to the station this afternoon. You've some baggage there, haven't you?"

"Yes." She was puzzled. "A trunk and a box of tack." It didn't occur to her until much later to wonder how he knew.

"If you'll give me the checks," he said, "I'll bring it up."

She had them in the little purse in her pocket. She found them and handed them over and he took them and said, "Thanks," and walked over to his car and began to unhitch the trailer.

She was dazed. None of this was happening in the way it should. She went slowly over to Mac's box and fetched her grooming tackle. She was beginning to sponge the wet patch on his back when she heard footsteps again and looked up and saw Olivant close to her.

"I've an invitation for you," he said. "From George Fowler. Can you dine with him tonight? Seven or a little earlier. Make it six-thirty and there'll be plenty of time for cocktails."

Damn him, he was eyeing Mac again.

She said, "Please tell Mr. Fowler I'd like to come very much," and deliberately went on with her work. She didn't look up even when she heard his car drive away.

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## Chapter Six

AT SIX-THIRTY she was still hauling creased and flattened dresses out of her big trunk. It seemed hopeless to find anything fit to wear: maybe she'd better put on the knitted suit again and try to be content.

And then, at the very bottom of the trunk, she found the dinner dress of white silk jersey with the bright red flowers at the waist. She shook it out, and its unwrinkled folds fell softly into shape.

She couldn't help remembering the first and last time she'd worn it—the night Bruce had left for England. He had opened his eyes very wide in admiration and said he hoped no one would know he was her brother. . . .

She took out the short, red jacket which belonged to the dress and found that it, too, could be worn. She closed the trunk and hurried in to turn on her bath—and within half an hour was walking slowly toward the Inn buildings.

It wasn't quite dark yet: there was a slate-colored haze above the hills. She stopped at the mouth of the trail down to the little amphitheater: she had suddenly remembered the deer and the bobcat. She lifted the long skirt and picked her way carefully to the edge of the hill and looked down. But there was nothing to see, except the stream and the knoll and the trees.

She retraced her steps and made her way around the Inn. As she neared the bungalow, she heard laughter. The

owner's she knew; the other, deeper toned, must be Olivant's. It was pleasant to hear, and she found herself surprised.

She went up the steps and tapped lightly on the screen. She saw that the old man wore a dark suit while Olivant—again he was surprising—was in a dinner jacket.

"Hello!" she said, and both men turned and Mr. Fowler came quickly across the room to bring her in. He seemed dreadfully thin and frail, she thought.

"Miss Elliot, you look fine!" He stared at her with admiration and she felt a sudden glow.

"Good evening," Olivant said, and he looked at her too.

"You're very urban," she said. "Not even a soft collar." The words slipped out. She hadn't meant to say them, or anything like them. That wasn't the sort of thing she said, ever.

Olivant smiled: his eyes seemed to go up at the corners and he looked, she thought, detachedly satanic.

He said, "The male's the real strutter, you know. Besides, I've nothing between this and a grey flannel suit."

"Now for a drink," Mr. Fowler said. "Fowler Specials tonight!" He crossed the room and went through the swing-door to the small kitchen.

Olivant's eyes were still watching her, and unexpectedly Janet felt very conscious of herself. She didn't know whether she liked the feeling or not. She turned away and looked about the room and felt she must move and yet didn't want to.

But she did, going slowly over to the alcove in which stood a dining table with three places set. In the middle of the table was a centerpiece of flowers, simple and blazing with color and very skilfully arranged.

She stared at it. She must speak in a minute—and perhaps the Greek would do as a subject.

Olivant's voice came from close behind her. She started: she hadn't heard him move.

"Interesting study, Lenardos," he said. "Like a magazine article on *The Psychology of the Gunman*."

Janet turned quickly. How could he possibly have known what she was thinking about? He was still looking at her, and she moved away from the table. She passed him and crossed to the couch against the far wall and sank down onto it. She took a cigarette from the box on the end-table, and he was ready with a match. She felt better. She said:

"Yes, he is interesting, isn't he? The Greek, I mean." She drew deeply on the cigarette. "But I suppose people always are: it's just that some are more obvious about it." She sounded as masterfully trite as she had meant to be. She wondered how long it took to make a Fowler Special.

Olivant laughed. He was laughing at her, but she didn't mind. She suddenly rather liked him to laugh at her, and she was conscious all at once of a lot of things about him that she hadn't known she'd noticed—the shape of his head and the long lean lines of his body and the way one eyebrow grew higher than the other.

"It's a good thing you don't believe that," he said.

Now she didn't like him laughing at her. She said:

"You're awfully superior, aren't you? I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I do think people are interesting!"

"An occasional person, for an occasional reason. But you said 'people' so that it spelt Humanity."

She set the cigarette in an ashtray. "I know I did."

There was a tinkling, bumping sound from behind the swing door to the kitchen, and Olivant went toward it with long strides.

"Try ants," he said over his shoulder, and opened the door and held it for the old man to come through.

"What in?" Mr. Fowler chuckled. "Pants?" He was labouring beneath the weight of a vast tray which bore a frosted shaker and elaborate glasses.

"Just for scale." Olivant took the tray from him and set it down upon the table. "They're a lot more interesting than humanity. Much older civilization."

The old man fussed over the tray and brought Janet a glass brimfull of a strange, greenish-golden liquid.

"Just try it," he said. "Never mind what it looks like." She sipped hesitantly; then smiled and drank deeply.

"Good!" she said.

Fowler beamed at her. "Boys used to like it." He filled a glass for Olivant and one for himself and sat down on the couch beside her.

The Fowler Special was very good and very potent. Janet relaxed, and found that she was enjoying herself; enjoying herself with that peculiarly exciting, ominous sort of enjoyment that she'd only felt once or twice since the early days with Mark; the sort of enjoyment she'd so often tried to imitate, with varying degrees of success, in later times but which had always, sooner or later but generally later, reduced itself to a rather dull kind of ashes.

They had another Fowler Special, and then half a one. The old man wanted to make a fresh batch—but Olivant, with Janet's full support, succeeded in restraining him, and he rang a bell instead and presently the Greek came, shepherding Sherry and another waiter and subsequently supervising the serving of dinner with a watchful, coldly calculating eye.

The meal was simple, but very, very good—and there

were two ice pails, in one of which there always seemed to be a new bottle of champagne.

The talk was desultory, and confined mostly to the two men. Janet ate and drank and smiled at them and answered one or two questions and didn't really listen to what they were saying but occupied herself in wondering about them and the surroundings—and Janet Elliot.

It was such a strange place—and they were such a strange party when she really came to think about them. She wasn't so strange in herself, she supposed, but she certainly was when considered as an apex to this social triangle. Or maybe she was the hypotenuse or something. But Mr. Fowler was a strange person in his own right—and so, by many more tokens, was the man Olivant. And they were an even stranger mixture together than each was in himself, and that was saying a great deal in the way of strangeness.

Repressing a temptation to consider Olivant first, she made herself concentrate upon Mr. Fowler. He said something to her and she was startled out of her thoughts but managed to make some sort of mildly amusing reply which tided her over. She felt Olivant looking at her and wondered whether he knew how much off-balance she had been.

She turned her attention to the food and the men began talking again and she was free to consider her host. He was, she suspected, very old; older than one would imagine—and one would imagine sixty-ish. But it seemed not to matter at all, or if it did, to be a pleasant thing to think about. To be so content, and so interested, and so wise and kindly and . . . and so *mysterious*, he must have led a life intensely worth living. But what sort of life, which had left him with this unlikely Inn, and the improbable devotion of the more unlikely Greek, and the manners of a

genial aristocrat combining so pleasantly with speech which was definitely tough? And, above all, how did it happen—how could it possibly happen—that there was this obviously deep friendship with Olivant?

There she was, back at Olivant—and he chose this very moment to astonish her again.

“It’s a strange thing,” he said to her, “but I can’t understand why I have any truck with this old reprobate!” He smiled at Mr. Fowler. “Or he with me, if it comes to that!”

Janet said, “I’m glad you added that last sentence.” She might have gone on, but was prevented by the appearance of coffee and the well-ordered bustle of table-clearing.

Then, the coffee served and a promising-looking bottle set down in front of Mr. Fowler, the three of them were alone. The two men started talking again and she was once more free for speculation. It was easier now: she was screened behind cigarette smoke and there were no hovering servants.

If Olivant insisted upon being thought about, perhaps the best thing would be to think about him and get him over with. First, what was this “Professor” business? Was it a nickname? Or a title? And whichever it was, what was he doing here, with the best-looking ‘chaser she’d ever seen, and being trainer and exercise-boy and groom to it, all in the same breath? And where did he get this trick of answering other people’s thoughts aloud just after they’d thought them? And why should he be so disturbing? And how was he a friend of Mr. Fowler’s? And what age would he be? . . .

She became aware of Mr. Fowler standing at her elbow, poising the interesting bottle invitingly over the huge bubble-glass which had appeared by her coffee-cup—and

she knew at the same time that she had been looking at Olivant while she was thinking about him.

"You'll take a drop of this, won't you, Miss Elliot?" The old man didn't wait for any answer, but gently poured a liberal splash of dark gold into the bottom of the glass. The rich, softly-stinging scent of old brandy reached her nostrils.

"It's good!" said Mr. Fowler. "Fellow I got it from—he really knew!"

Janet made weak protest. "I don't think I ought to. Are you trying to put me under the table?"

But the old man was back at his place, sitting down and passing the bottle to Olivant.

And Olivant, having poured brandy into his own glass, was looking at her.

"Forty-ish," he said. "Poor but scholarly parents."

"What's he talkin' about?" said the old man.

Janet said, "I haven't the faintest idea," and was pleased with herself for so quickly, and she hoped invisibly, recovering from the third shock which this mind-reading trick had given her.

Olivant smiled. It was almost a grin, Janet decided, very carefully not looking at it. But it couldn't be exactly a grin, because it sort of ran up one side of his face: it was absolutely infuriating—and very attractive.

She picked up the great glass and swilled the brandy around in it and remembered Bruce saying "*Break the skin before you warm it!*"

She was suddenly so sorry for herself that she would never see Bruce again that there was a lump in her throat. It was as big as an egg. She cupped the glass in her hands and put it up to her face: they couldn't see her now, and



the fumes of the brandy, velvety yet astringent, mounted to her head and cleared it.

Olivant set down his glass without taking his hands from around it.

"This is brandy!" he said severely to Fowler. "You shouldn't use pettifogging little adjectives like 'good'!"

Janet wondered whether Bruce would have liked Olivant and told herself she wasn't sure.

The fumes were strong; and she lowered the glass and saw that Fowler and Olivant were leaning toward each other. They were talking in low, murmuring voices which she couldn't catch.

"That's extremely rude," she said, but they didn't seem to hear.

"All right." Olivant was suddenly audible. "But I'm not sure about it."

He rose and crossed the room to the big radio cabinet which stood against the far wall. Janet heard him lift the lid and start rummaging about.

"A little music," Mr. Fowler said. He was smiling broadly. "Somethin' good—to go with the brandy."

Janet said, "That's a fine idea," and took a sip from her glass. She heard movements from the radio cabinet, and after them the sound of a needle softly shissing on the first grooves of a record.

And then, shocking her physically like an unexpected shower of cold water, came the first clear-cut, cascading notes of Ravel's *Jeux d'Eau* and she herself was playing them.

She caught her breath—and then hoped against hope that no one had heard the sharp little hiss of intaken air. She sat very still and looked down at the glass cupped in her hands. Olivant stayed out of sight by the machine, but

she knew that the old man was looking at her, smiling delightedly.

She didn't want to look at him. She was well aware that she was foolish, but she was filled momentarily with a blind rage against him, against the man who was standing somewhere behind her, and against the doctors—and the Nazis who had taken Bruce away so that she would never see him again—and Mark, forever posturing in his little ignorances and cruelties—and the thousands of millions of idiot people who didn't know what it meant to break a piece of your body so that you could no longer make it obey you, not even to do the work it had been trained for years to do, the work which really wasn't work because it was so much a part of you. . . .

For a moment she even found herself enraged against McTavish. But this frightened her out of the horrid whirling circle of futile hate—and she was ashamed. She set the glass down and looked across the table at the old man and smiled at him.

She had been conscious of the music all the time, but now she really listened to it, and went on listening, with a strange, ghostlike feeling, until the very end: she felt, she thought, as a soldier who had lost his legs might feel if he watched an old moving picture of himself playing football.

The last notes brought the sharp but somehow misty end, and the fountain stopped playing. . . .

The machine was switched off, and, in a moment, Olivant came back to Janet's side.

He looked down at her and said, "Thank you."

Mr. Fowler was staring at him indignantly. "Hey!" he said. "Go back and play the one on the other side. . . ." He turned to Janet. "That's good playin', Miss Elliot!

Good music too!" He glared at Olivant again. "Go on back: we want the other side!"

Janet smiled at the old man. "No, please, Mr. Fowler." She shook her head, while he looked at her in dismay.

Olivant pushed forward his glass. "More," he said, and reached for the bottle. He was diverting the old man's attention from her, and she felt a sudden wave of gratitude.

But Mr. Fowler was not so easily sidetracked.

"If you don't, I will!" He began to push back his chair as if to go to the victrola himself.

Janet knew she had to do it. She desperately wanted not to. But for some reason she must. She said: "Don't, please, Mr. Fowler," and nearly left it at that, but gathered courage from the fact that if she didn't tell him the real reason, he'd think she was being "artistic" or something equally dreadful. And so might Olivant.

"It's a sort of a sob-story," she said. "But I can't play any more." She was surprised how easily the words came out—and then more surprised still by the naturalness with which she held out the offending hand for them to see.

"I broke it," she said. "It seems to be all right—for everything but the piano."

Olivant said, "That's a loss to everyone who's fond of music," and then lifted his glass to his mouth and drank. She didn't have to say anything to him—and again she felt gratitude.

"I'm sorry!" Mr. Fowler was looking at her with horrified concern. "I shouldn't of made the Professor put it on, I guess! I'm sorry!"

"Don't be," Janet said. She felt much better. "I'm glad you played it. I was flattered. As a matter of fact, I thought it was pretty good myself."

"You were right," Olivant said, and Mr. Fowler nodded emphatically.

There was a silence. Olivant went on sipping his brandy—and Janet suddenly drained her own glass; she was surprised to find how little there was left in it; she must have been drinking without knowing she was.

"Can I have some more?" she said. "It's really marvelous. Even I know that."

The old man laughed and brought the bottle and poured far too much into her glass. The distress had gone from his face.

"Why don't we all get drunk?" said Olivant. "In celebration of something or other."

Janet said, "Get drunk!" and both men laughed and she realized that she was feeling wonderful.

She took a big swallow of brandy without properly warming it, and without closing her throat against the sting. She coughed, and the men laughed again.

"Celebration of what?" Mr. Fowler looked at Olivant.

Olivant said, "Oh, I don't know. Of our own wisdom in being here, if you like; right out of the world, or right in it—whichever way you like to look at it."

The old man chuckled. "Know why I get a kick out of him?" he said to Janet. "I never know what he's talkin' about, half the time!"

Janet laughed. She felt very happy. She took another, far more cautious swallow of brandy. She said:

"Perhaps he doesn't—always." She suddenly felt as if she had known the old man since she was a child—and then wished she really had. She said:

"But I think that's a very good reason for getting—I mean *being*—drunk; because we're wise to be here."

Mr. Fowler poured brandy for himself. There was more

color in the thin, waxen cheeks than Janet had seen before. He didn't warm his glass between his hands, but held the stem of it in two fingers and drank as if it were a highball.

"What'd he mean?" he said. "You tell me! Right out of the world or right in it? Don't make sense to me!" He winked at Janet with the eye further away from his other guest.

"Nuts!" said Olivant, and the one-sided grin slid up his face again, and then vanished as his eyes caught Janet's and held them.

She had the most extraordinary sensation. It was as if his eyes had actually touched her eyes with invisible but sharply burning antennae. A vibrating shock seemed to run down behind her eyes to the nape of her neck and then spread itself, interfering with her breathing, all over her.

She almost gasped. She knew all about the little tingling feelings which sometimes come from eyes meeting, and she knew they didn't come in ones; if you had them, there was a delightful certainty that the other person had them too.

But this was different, utterly different. It was big, and alarming, and violent. It was almost like a blow—and she couldn't tell whether or not it had struck her alone.

There was a silence which seemed to last far too long. But she couldn't break it; she couldn't do anything to break it. And she couldn't, although she willed herself to, take her eyes away.

And then, all at once, there was no silence and everything was going on, smoothly and ordinarily, as if nothing at all had happened.

"Right out the world or right in it!" the old man was saying again with jocular scorn. "That really don't make sense." It was strange: he was talking as if there hadn't

been any pause at all. She found a cigarette and Olivant held a light for her. She didn't look at him.

"You shut up, Fowler," said Olivant. "You're just trying to make me talk to save yourself the trouble."

"Sure!" The old man laughed, and winked at Janet.

She found her voice. "What *did* you mean?" she said to Olivant, managing to look toward but not at him. She thought it might be a good thing to make him talk.

"Just what I said." He sounded faintly weary. "Out of the world where no one's quite certain what they're doing. In the world where everybody is."

Mr. Fowler was delighted. He chuckled infectiously and looked at Janet.

"See what I mean?" he said.

Janet smiled at him. "Yes," she said. She looked toward Olivant without meeting his eyes. "What are you getting at—exactly? . . . I'll grant you the whole world seems to have gone crazy. But why are we sane? You said 'a world where people know what they're doing.' But do we? What are we doing?"

She occupied herself with picking a loose piece of tobacco from the end of her cigarette, but she could feel him looking at her.

He said, "I shouldn't have been so sweeping. I wasn't really counting you. You very possibly don't recognize what you're doing."

The tone more than the words filled her with sudden resentment. She lifted her head and met his eyes squarely. She saw the lights in them, and the faint puckerings of a smile at their corners—but she was safe. Nothing happened—except that this suspicion of a smile increased her annoyance. She said:

"Really, that's very interesting. What *am* I doing here?"

"Running away." His voice was casual—but the faint smile seemed to have disappeared.

Mr. Fowler stood up. "What say we grab ourselves some better seats." He was making gallant efforts to change the talk—and fussed about while Janet settled herself on the sofa and Olivant brought the brandy glasses and the bottle away from the dining table.

But she wouldn't be switched like this. She looked at Olivant squarely as he sat down.

"So I'm running away, am I?" she said, trying to sound tolerantly amused. "Would you mind telling me what from?"

He wasn't looking at her now. "Oh, I don't know. . . . Why don't we skip it: I was just playing the fool."

But he didn't sound as politely apologetic as the words should have sounded. He didn't sound apologetic at all. He sounded . . . she couldn't think of the right word . . . *condescending*.

She nursed the brandy glass between her hands and smiled at him sweetly—and then at Mr. Fowler, who seemed to have given up all idea of changing the topic and be resigned to his fate.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fowler," she said. "I suppose I'm being a nuisance—but you shouldn't have let me drink so much. . . ." She looked at Olivant again. "Please! You started this: what am I supposed to be running away from?"

He set his glass down on the floor. He said:

"Several things. Your hand's one. I mean your unlucky inability to follow your profession any more. And there's something else I wouldn't know about. Or more than one thing. Perhaps one of 'em's a love affair."

"Really?" she said, although she was frightened some-

where inside her. "Do you know, that isn't at all what I thought you were going to say. I thought you meant I was running away from that world you were talking about—the world where no one quite knows what they're doing. . . ."

There was no pause this time before he answered: it seemed that, having been forced to go to work on her, he was determined to do a quick and thorough job.

He said, "I did—in a way. In placid, prosperous eras, one's own troubles don't often make one run away. They're too interesting, especially to other people. But when the whole world's in big trouble up to the ears, one's own are bound to seem pretty small. And the ego can't stand that—so it makes you run away."

She was going to say something—afterwards she could never remember what—but the old man jumped into the little breach of silence. He was trying again to do what Bruce had always called "*Happy-up the atmosphere.*"

"And what 'm I doin', Rich?" he said. "Just dyin'?"

Olivant laughed at him: It was a friendly laugh—and she suddenly felt lost and excluded. She watched the old man's face as Olivant spoke.

"You? You're just sitting back and watching people. As long as they're superficially happy, you let 'em alone. If they aren't, you try and do something about it."

The old man laughed. He made a move as if to pick up the brandy bottle, but Olivant forestalled him.

"Let me do that." He rose in a quick, easy, flowing movement, and Janet thought: he *did* say forty-ish, didn't he?

He tipped brandy into Janet's glass before she had noticed what he was doing. She watched his back while he treated Fowler's glass, and then his own, in the same



way. She knew she oughtn't to say what she was going to say, but it came out just the same. She said:

"And what are you doing here, Mr. Olivant?"

He smiled broadly for the first time since she had met him. It was, she thought, a damnably attractive smile. She wished she knew whether it were friendly.

"Minding my business," he said. "Which I've recently decided is the making and running of possibly the greatest steeplechase horse in the history of racing."

Mr. Fowler chuckled. "Listen to him! Nothin' but the best for the Prof.!"

"Exactly." Olivant looked at him. "And don't call me that—even if you do smile. I've eschewed all that."

"Huh?" said the old man, and winked at Janet.

"It's all behind me, you old pest. I'm never going to teach anything again to anyone—except Fitzgerald."

"Fitzgerald! There's a screwy name for a horse—huh, Miss Elliot?" The old man was beaming.

She said, "Oh, I don't know. From what I've seen of the horse, I think it suits him. Anyway, it's not nearly so . . . so screwy as my horse's name, which is El Mc-Tavish."

"And a pretty good old sort he is," said Olivant. His tone came nearer to being genial than any she had so far heard him use—but she was filled with a sudden anger. She knew she was being childish, but that only made her angrier. *Pretty good, indeed! . . . Old sort! . . .*

She said, very sweetly, "You know, Mr. Olivant, it all sounds to me as if you're doing some escaping yourself."

He smiled. He was utterly infuriating.

"Oh, no," he said. "I'm just going on with my work and observing."

She remembered something. "Oh, I see. You amuse

yourself training your microscope on the human ant-hill. Is that it?"

He was completely unruffled. "Exactly." He was probably thinking she was very silly.

She took a cigarette from a box on the table beside her and struck a match quickly, before anyone could do it for her.

"Their struggles must be very entertaining," she said. "To a superior mind, of course." She wanted to stop but couldn't—perhaps it was the brandy. "But don't you ever feel any sympathy for them—for one side or the other? Don't you ever want to be down in the heap yourself? You could at least fight on the weaker side."

"Hey!" The old man's voice was suddenly commanding, and she looked at him in surprise. She felt guilty and embarrassed, and couldn't properly answer the smile he was giving her to counteract his peremptoriness.

"If you're talkin' about what I think you're talkin' about," he said, "watch your step, Miss Elliot. Them ants"—he chuckled—"they had another pack of trouble a few years back—an' the Prof. . . . the Ant here, he was in it up to the ears." He chuckled again, and Olivant made an abrupt movement, immediately checked. She had a feeling that he was going to speak, but the old man didn't give him a chance. "You see, Miss Elliot, he was just a kid, but he taught himself to fly, an' he put in some plain and fancy lyin' to the Frogs over there, an' horned into that Lafayette thing."

"Lafayette Escadrille?" asked Janet with a sinking heart.

Mr. Fowler beamed. "That's it! An' he was a kingfish even in that bunch!"

"Oh shut up!" said Olivant. "That's nothing to do with anything now."

"Yeah," said the old man, still looking at Janet. "An ace in a sleeve fulla aces, he was! Got a little banged-up too, last time he was shot down. Near ruined one of his bellows. . . ."

Olivant stood up. "Be quiet, you old crook!" he said, and poured himself some more brandy.

Janet felt small and ashamed—and yet very angry with herself because she was illogical enough to feel these things. She said:

"I . . . I hadn't any idea. I must have sounded insufferable . . ." She made herself look at Olivant—and was taken unaware by another completely unexpected shock as her eyes met his.

Olivant said, "That's absolutely nothing to do with anything we've been talking about. All I meant was that I've reached an age—and acquired enough knowledge—not to grow too much exercised over the excellent institution of war."

"*Excellent institution!*" she said incredulously.

"Can't understand a word!" Mr. Fowler chuckled happily.

Olivant was looking at her. She met his eyes, and it was all right. He said:

"Of course it's an excellent institution. Where would the world be without it? It teaches men to fight and women to breed—which is primarily what they're both for. It reduces overcrowded populations and advances convenience for the following generations. Several million men spend a little while trying to kill each other, and their descendants reap untold benefit—in medicine and science and transport and all means of intercommunication and—although it's only a little at a time—in general understanding of each other."

Janet stared at him. "That's horribly . . . horribly specious. But it's all wrong. It *has* to be wrong!"

"You're making the usual mistake," he said. "You're not looking at the question of war at all. You're looking at *this particular* war. They all do that—even good minds like Roosevelt and Churchill."

She said, "Don't you think you ought to tell them?" She couldn't resist it, infantile though it might be.

The smile which was almost a grin ran up one side of his face.

"They wouldn't pay attention," he said. "But I mean what I'm saying. Even the better-grade minds don't see it straight. They give themselves away, every time, by pretending that any current big war is going to be the last one. All the people do it all the time—because they personally are being made horribly uncomfortable by their particular war, and that prevents them from looking at war historically—objectively. Which is why they never understand that war's a very good thing for the human race. I mean for the race as a race, not for one or two generations. And they not only fail to see that, because they're so frightened and uncomfortable; they can't even see that when they talk about 'putting an end to war' they're talking childish nonsense; refusing to face the fact that as long as there are two men in the world, one of them will always have something the other one wants—and then there'll be a fight."

"Maybe over a woman," said Mr. Fowler.

"It all sounds like sense." To her surprise, Janet found herself worried. "But there's something wrong with it somewhere. It's . . . it's such an inhuman way of looking at things."

"To be interested in all humanity instead of just your own cross-section—*id est*, yourself?"

She tried again. "It's wrong somewhere! . . . In a minute you'll be saying the Nazis are a boon to mankind, or something equally ridiculous."

"I don't have to take any minute. I'll say it now. Properly regarded, Adolf Hitler, or Schicklgruber, is an embryo blessing to society." The smile was back on his face. "That do for you?"

"I suppose that's a joke." She was angry. "I don't think it's very funny somehow."

The old man got to his feet without their noticing him. He loomed over Janet now and poured more brandy into her glass.

"Need all your strength talkin' to him!" He passed the bottle to Olivant and then folded again into his big chair, his face wrinkled up in an enormous smile.

Without thinking, Janet sipped at the brandy. She said:

"That's absolute nonsense!" and sipped again—and then remembered she had told herself not to drink any more and set the glass down on the side-table.

Olivant shook his head. "It's not nonsense at all—it's just a natural corollary to what I said before. Keep it straight in your head. I am not saying that I, personally, like or admire any part of Schicklgruber or his works. I don't: in common with several million of my fellows I think he's a paranoiac little squirt with an accidental genius for leadership and some thundering good generals. What I'm trying to explain is that looked at in the proper light, he's a distinct benefit to future humanity. Is it clear that way?"

"Oh, I see what you're trying to prove." Janet was nettled. "But it doesn't work. Suppose he won!"

"He'd be overthrown later—and his ideology. The eventual benefits to the race of this war would still be there."

"It's all logical," she said helplessly. "And it's all wrong!"

He had his glass up to his mouth. She thought he was smiling, but his face was grave when he set down the glass and looked at her.

"Would it make you feel better if I reeled off some benefits we can see already? I'll try. First of all, Schicklgruber's such a wonderfully villainous, mustache-twirling heavy that he's brought all the decent men in the world to banding together. Second, he's shown the great Latin races that, as soon as they possibly can, they'd better change their form of Government. Third, he's indirectly provided employment for hundreds of thousands of jobless in these United States. Fourth, he's caused even greater strides in aviation than the '14-'18 rehearsal. Fifth, he's steadily making the world permanently unsafe for autocracy. Sixth and seventh, he's provided new limelight for Lindbergh and literally hoisted Mr. Burton K. Wheeler from abysmal obscurity to the glories of the front page."

"You're just being silly," Janet said—but she was smiling

"He's right!" The old man's words were so sharp and unexpected that Janet looked at him in surprise.

"He's right!" he said again, in a sort of violent wonder. "God damn if he ain't right!"

There was a sound of feet upon the steps and the screen-door was opened softly and the dark figure of the Greek stood just inside it. Mr. Fowler looked toward him and scowled.

"To hell with it, Eddie!" he said. "Come back later."

But Olivant was on his feet. He looked at Janet and she stood up.

She said, "Really, I have to go, Mr. Fowler. It's after twelve—and I have to be up early to see to my horse."

"Same here." Olivant stretched out his hand and took the old man's. "Thanks," he said.

The Greek still stood silent in the doorway. Mr. Fowler glanced toward him—and then grinned.

"Okay," he said. "Okay." He bowed to Janet with his marquis's bow. "Sure enjoyed havin' you here, Miss Elliot. We'll do a repeat pretty soon." He looked at Olivant. "That's right, ain't it, Rich?"

Olivant smiled. "That's right! And I won't talk so much next time." He stood aside to let her pass, and Janet, having murmured her thanks, found herself at the door. The Greek moved silently past her into the room.

She was just going to open the screen herself when Olivant appeared from behind her.

"Let me," he said, and put out his hand toward the catch.

It was dark in the little lobby-like space, and without design his hand brushed against hers.

It was as if something had burned her. . . . No, it wasn't, it was as if she'd accidentally touched the points of a little electric battery. . . . No, it wasn't, it was as if she had touched him—and found the physical contact was even more startling than the metaphysical meeting of the eyes had been. She drew in her breath sharply.

He held open the door and she went slowly down the three steps to the narrow path across the lawn. Her hand was tingling still. He came quickly up beside her—and she knew that if she didn't speak, he would—and she didn't want him to yet. . . .

She said, "The Greek's certainly an argument for that theory of yours about this place. *He* knows what he's do-

ing!" She was going to go on and say something about taking care of Mr. Fowler—but she suddenly saw that Olivant was rubbing at his hand as if it hurt him; the hand which had touched hers.

He said, "And at the moment we're two more!"

She halted abruptly and turned to face him.

"That's either very bad manners," she said. "Or a bad joke. Either way, it's bad taste."

They stood in the black shadow of a tree, and she could only see his face as a dark blur against the whiteness of his shirt and collar. She felt, ridiculously, as if she wanted to cry—and was so astonished by this that she missed his first words.

"... deplorable trick of honesty," he was saying. "But I do know the build-up, really—and *all* the gambits. Just give me a minute or two."

She heard the words clearly enough, but they didn't make any sort of shape in her muddled mind. From behind the curtained windows of the Inn above them, music came suddenly—muted strings playing *The Vienna Woods*. To her right, the light in the living room of the bungalow was switched off and there was only the moonlight, dim through the canopy of the tree, to thaw the darkness about them. The air was soft with a downlike softness and sharply, sweetly scented. She didn't feel that she wanted to cry any more: there was a queer, warm radiation in the pit of her stomach—as if she'd been in pain and had just been given an injection of morphine.

The music, which had been very low, swelled a little louder—and she felt a hand upon her arm; a strong, firm, gentle hand whose separate fingers she could feel distinctly through the silk of the scarlet jacket.

"Thank God for Strauss!" His voice was very low—and



very close to her. "But perhaps I shouldn't say that to a musician."

She said, "Why not? I love Strauss," and didn't realize that her voice was lowered to match his.

The gentle grip was still upon her arm, and he seemed to be nearer to her.

"It's music," he said. "It's *there*, but you don't have to listen to it and it doesn't bully you. . . ."

She smiled up at the dark face she couldn't see. She felt warm and happy and determined to hold this minute and make it stand still.

"I know exactly what you mean," she said softly.

"Do you?" He sounded eager, and the exciting warmth within her deepened. He had both his hands on her arms now, and the fingers of the new hand seemed to be burning her without any pain. He said:

"But you're a woman—thank God! So you can't possibly understand what it can do to a man!" He stopped abruptly—and she realized, with a disproportionate pang of disappointment, that the music had ceased.

But it was only for a moment. Somewhere, someone or something changed one wax disc for another—and the greatest orchestra in America burst into the opening bars of Weber's *Invitation to the Waltz*.

"And this—this is even better," he said. "It helps me even more than Strauss."

There was an arm about her shoulders now—and she suddenly resisted its pressure. She said:

"Helps you?"

"Immeasurably!" She didn't resist the arm any more. "It brushes away all those ridiculous barriers of self-consciousness; all those silly fears of being rebuffed and feeling a fool afterwards. . . . Of course it helps! It helps me not

to be afraid of you! It helps me to say you're the most desirable thing I've ever seen! Everything about you is terrifyingly right—and very, very beautiful. Your hair, and the way it traps the light. . . . Your eyes, and the way they hurt me. . . . Your lovely, lovely mouth. . . .”

“Don’t!” she said shakily. “Please don’t!”

The arm tightened around her. “Why? Why shouldn’t I be allowed to speak the truth? Why mustn’t I tell you what the look of you does to me—the look and feel and scent and texture of you! Why?”

She closed her eyes and leaned back against his arm. “Because . . . because you’re upsetting me. . . . And . . . and I don’t know you very well.”

She expected the arm to tighten its hold. She expected the other arm, too, to come about her. She expected anything—except what she got.

The arm fell away from her shoulders—and both her hands were caught by two other hands which held them only lightly. And his voice was changed completely when he spoke.

“Hey!” he said. “Come down off that ivory tower, Princess! I’ve forgotten the rest of my lines, anyway—and I want you!”

She let her hands lie limply in his. She stared at him through the darkness in utter amazement for seconds which felt like hours.

And then, with a sudden dreadful shock, she reheard in her head the words whose meaning she had not bothered to gather; the words he had said after she had reproached him when they had first left the bungalow. “. . . I do know the build-up, really—all the gambits. . . .”

Her hands were released and he was close to her again and two long arms came about her.

"Hello, Janet!" he said.

With a violent wrenching of her whole body, she pulled herself free and thrust him away with both hands against his chest.

"You . . . you *bastard!*" she said furiously.

He caught at her hand, but she tore it away.

"What the hell's the matter?" Astonishment sharpened his voice.

She said, "I *hate* actors!" and turned and began blindly to walk in the direction of the driveway. She heard footsteps behind her and quickened her pace. She heard his voice, but would not turn.

"Are you out of your mind?" he said. "I *told* you I was going into the routine. . . ."

And then, as she still marched straight ahead, the footsteps ceased abruptly—and she walked on alone.

She toiled up the steep pathway and onto her porch. She opened the door and, feeling suddenly limp and exhausted, slowly crossed the long room. She lit the candles on the mantel—and then found herself standing by the big window, staring down at the moon-flooded little valley.

She ran a hand roughly through her hair; then dropped it to her side in heavy futility. She supposed she was behaving like a fool. She was dangerously near to tears. . . .

There were quick footsteps on the path and then the porch. The door opened—and was closed again.

She heard him cross the uncarpeted floor toward her. He stood close behind her. She wanted to turn around. She wanted to touch him. But she didn't move.

"Janet!" he said. "Janet!"

He pulled her back against him, and his hands cupped themselves over her breasts.

"Please!" he said.

She felt as if all her bones had become liquid.

"Let me turn around," she said in a muffled voice.

Through the foggy tumult of her thoughts she grew conscious of an outside sound, an intruding, dangerous, everyday sort of sound which threatened the magic bubble of their isolation. It was the sound of running feet—and it grew nearer all the time. Now it pounded up the pathway, and the feet hammered on the porch and a hand hammered on the door.

"Miss! Hey, Miss!" came Sherry's voice, hoarse and roughened by his laboured breathing. "Miss—Mr. Olivant's horse! . . . He's awful sick or somethin', Miss! . . . What'll we do, Miss? . . . Are you awake, Miss? . . ." The voice cut off its panting words, and the knocking was redoubled.

She was free now. The arms had been withdrawn from beneath her arms, the hands from her breasts. She forced herself back to reality—and wheeled about and made for the door. Olivant stood where he was.

She threw open the door, wide. She said, "All right, Sherry," and turned to Olivant. "He says your horse is sick. . . ." she began; then cut off further speech as he went past her like a wind and was gone.

"Come on, Sherry!" she said—and ran out onto the porch herself and down the steps and onto the path.

Sherry passed her as she reached the driveway, and she laboured after him, hampered by the long skirt and flimsy, high-heeled sandals. Olivant was out of sight.

As she drew near the yard, she heard a spasmodic and alarming thud-thud of hooves on timber—and then the stable lights flashed on and for a second there was silence. She realized dimly that the lights must be controlled from inside the tackroom, and then was frightened anew by a

fresh convulsion of the pounding. A board splintered somewhere with a brittle, dangerous sound—and she turned into the yard, wrenching her ankle badly as a heel slipped on the loose gravel.

The white, glaring beam from the overhead bulb in the corner by the tackroom flooded harshly down, and everything stood out in harsh, theatrical relief. But she couldn't see Olivant anywhere. McTavish's head, thrust out from the dark frame of his doorway, turned toward her, the sardonic twist of his lip very much in evidence.

Sherry was pressed to the wall by Fitzgerald's box. He darted cautious glances into it every now and then, withdrawing his head sharply after each peep. She saw that his face was dirty grey in the white light as she came up beside him.

"What's a matter with him, Miss?" His voice was shaky and high-pitched. "He keeps on rollin' around and kickin'! Why don't he get up?"

Janet pushed him aside and peered over the bolted lower half of the door.

"Cast," she said.

The black stallion was on his back, angled across the doorway, with his hindquarters so near the corner of the box that he could not swing them enough to gain sufficient leverage to roll over upon either flank and raise himself. His eyes, staring up from his inverted head, showed white and wild and terrifying, and his bulk, amorphous in this weird position of unnatural indignity, was ghastly and grotesque, with spidery inadequate legs reaching up and scrabbling vainly at the air. He was still for a moment as she spoke to him, then terror at his impotence seized him once more and he became convulsed in another wild flurry of thrashing hooves and jerking, uselessly straining muscles.

He had broken out now, and she could see the great shining patches of sweat upon his neck and belly.

She said, "Where's Mr. Olivant?" and fumbled with the bolt upon the door as the spasm died momentarily.

"Get away from there!" The voice was savage and imperious, and it came from somewhere at the back of the stall. "Unless you want a kick in the stomach!"

Janet started, dropping her hands to her sides. She saw that Olivant, in shirtsleeves, was climbing through the window-frame in the back of the box. She stared, a little flame of resentment at his tone and words shooting up inside her, only to be instantly quenched.

He was in the box now. He was talking to his horse—and he sounded dreadfully like Bruce.

The stallion was very quiet—and the man, standing to the far side of the great quarters, bent now and gripped the tail with both hands. He heaved with a steady yet explosive exercise of strength—and the quarters moved a little, away from the corner and toward the middle of the box.

Olivant heaved again—and again the horse's quarters moved. Another heave, and they were almost in the center and the whole vast body was parallel with the door and no longer cornered.

Olivant straightened, and quickly stood away.

"Okay, Fitz!" he said. "Up you get!"

Sherry suddenly giggled. "Well, I'll be switched!" he said.

The stallion rolled onto his near flank, swung his weight, raised up on his forehand so that he looked for a moment like a giant watchdog, levered up his hindquarters and stood. He seemed enormous now, and his night-sheet was twisted all awry upon his body, giving him a raffish, hung-

over look. He blew loudly through his nostrils and turned an enquiring head toward the man beside him. He was trembling.

Olivant, his eyes always on the horse, moved toward the door and reached out a hand to twitch the head-collar from its peg. The hand went right past Janet's face, and she recoiled.

"Open the door!" he said, and slipped the halter over the black head. "Get me a day-sheet, boy! Off the rack in the tackroom."

He stripped off the wrinkled, trailing sheet and threw it over the door, which Janet unbolted and opened. Sherry, electrically important, was already pounding up the steps to the tackroom.

Olivant led the stallion out of the box: the jet coat was wet and shiny upon shoulders and flanks, and the gait was subdued and lackadaisical. From across the yard came a little grunt from McTavish which sounded purely contemptuous, and Janet watched him as he withdrew his head and turned himself about and disappeared into the shadows of his box.

She brought her gaze back to Olivant, and saw that he was holding the halter-rope in one hand while he felt at the stallion's forelegs with the other.

"Any damage?" She moved closer to them.

"Don't think so." The words were grunted—but at least they had not the sharp roughness of a few moments before.

"I'll hold him." She didn't wait for an answer, but took the rope from his hand.

"Thanks," he said—and his horse looked at her for a moment with head raised and ears pricked forward.

"Mr. Olivant!" Sherry's voice was pitched high. "Mr.

Olivant: I don't quite know what is a day-sheet. . . ." He stood just outside the tackroom door.

Olivant was feeling at the near hind now. He called, "On the rack. Tan, with red binding," and straightened himself and went back into the open box-stall and came out again with an armful of dry, clean straw which he dumped upon the ground.

Janet was eyeing the stallion, who stood very quietly, his head low.

"He looks all right," she said.

"Will be when he's dry. No harm done." Olivant had picked up a handful of straw and was rubbing vigorously at the darker patches upon the black coat.

"Has he done this before?" said Janet. "Cast himself, I mean?" She didn't really want to know: she just wanted to keep talking, and to make him answer.

He shook his head while he worked. "But he's not much better than a colt yet—just turned four. And he's full of grain and vinegar. Has to happen sometime."

Sherry came up importantly, with a brand new day-sheet over his arm. "This right, Mr. Olivant, sir?"

Olivant suddenly smiled at him—and for some reason Janet's heart grew lighter.

"That's right, son," he said. "Keep it a minute." He went on with the vigorous rubbing, and a steady little hissing noise came from his lips.

"This is Sherry," Janet said. "Sherry Robinson. He's horse-crazy—aren't you, Sherry?"

Sherry smiled widely and the gold tooth flashed in the white light. "Yes, Miss—if it's bein' crazy to feel the way I do."

Olivant laughed. "Good for you, Sherry!" He had finished now, and the stallion's short sleek coat was marred



and roughened where the patches of still damp hair had been rubbed the wrong way.

"Sorta lucky I happened to find out what was takin' place. . . ." The mixture of diffidence and pride in the boy's voice made Janet turn her head to hide a smile. "Wasn't it, Mr. Olivant?"

But Olivant didn't answer. He had picked up the rest of the dry straw and was spreading it to lie in an irregular layer over the horse's back and quarters.

"It certainly was lucky, Sherry!" Janet made haste to bring the fading smile back to the copper face. "How did you happen to be here?"

"I just sorta snuck up to take a look at 'em soon as I was off work, Miss." He sounded anxious about this. "That was all right, wasn't it, Miss?"

"Of course it was. But always be careful not to startle . . ." She broke off. He wasn't hearing what she said. He was fascinated by Horse and the business of looking after it. Olivant had taken the sheet from him and shaken it out, and now was throwing it over the stallion, on top of the straw, and loosely buckling the girth-straps. She watched the boy's face. She wished that Olivant would speak to him—and, while she was still wishing, he did.

He said, "It's warm that way, Sherry. But not too warm. The air circulates under the sheet, through the straw. Quick way to dry 'em."

Sherry nodded gravely. He wasn't pretending: he really understood.

Olivant said, "They should be kept moving, though, while they're drying. Don't have time to be nervous then." He took the halter-rope from Janet and held it out. "Like to walk him?"

Sherry's eyes gleamed as he took the rope. He looked up at the man in silent questioning.

"Oh, anywhere around," said Olivant. "There's another horse here, though—and we don't want to keep him awake. Take him out on the drive and walk him up and down. Not too near the Inn. Don't go further than Miss Elliot's house."

Janet's heart gave a foolish, unforeseen leap at hearing him use her name like this. Automatically, she stood back as Sherry, rapt, set off at a slow pace toward the hitching rack and the driveway.

Olivant called instructions after him. "That's right. . . . Take it easy. . . . Don't pull at him—and don't go too fast. . . . Just keep going. . . . Don't pay any attention to him. . . ."

She heard the crunching of the slow hooves recede. The moon was high, and a cool breeze had sprung up somewhere in the hills. She shivered, and pulled the red jacket closer about her. She was thinking—but she didn't know what about.

She felt a movement beside her, and saw that he was holding out a cigarette case. She said, "I wonder what time it is?" and took a cigarette and waited while he held a match for her.

"Nearly one." He lit a cigarette himself, and nodded his head in the direction which Sherry and the horse had taken. "That might be a good boy to have around."

"I love him," she said. "I honestly don't know what I'd have done without him." She went on making talk. "And if I ever saw a case of genuine horse-bug, he's it!"

"If we talked Fowler into letting him work for us, that'd make three." His voice was different. And he said "us" and "we" as if they were partners. She had a weird, wild feeling

that perhaps none of the things she kept remembering had really happened.

She said, "What an extraordinary evening this turned out to be!" She hadn't been sure she was going to say the words, but she was glad now they were out. She wondered if he were looking at her—and leaned back against the barn wall and smoked and kept staring straight ahead at nothing in particular.

He laughed—and she liked the sound. He said:

"See Anita Loos—'Life Keeps On Happening.'"

"But it has such choppy gaits," she said. She was rather pleased with this—and was hurt when she found that he wasn't listening. As she spoke, he moved from beside her and went with long strides toward the driveway. The slow, crunching hooves were approaching.

He stood by the hitching rail, with both hands on it. She watched his back. It was straight and supple, and tapered from wide shoulders to narrow waist. She was glad that he didn't wear suspenders. A dark shape loomed near him, outside the pool of hard white light.

"Okay, Sherry?" she heard him say—and then Sherry's voice, throbbing with pride and excitement. "All okay, Mr. Olivant, sir. He's walkin' slow and good!"

She dropped her cigarette to the ground and set her foot upon it. She heard Olivant's voice again, but couldn't catch the words.

The dim bulk turned and the hooves began to crunch away again and he came back to her.

"Not dry yet?" Her tone was far brighter than she had meant: it sounded horribly artificial in her ears.

He didn't speak, but made a little "m'hhh-ing" noise of negative affirmation. He leaned against the wall beside her and started to roll down the sleeves of his shirt. It was

very quiet, and the breeze had almost died. There came a soft, scraping noise and then two dull bumps from Mac's box as he lay down; sounds which were followed by a snorting, luxurious sigh of utter relaxation.

There was a movement at her side, and she saw, with a little start, that a hand was being held out to her; a hand from whose wrist there dangled untidily the two starched wings of an unfastened cuff.

"Would you mind fastening these damned links?" he said—and she could only hope he hadn't noticed her surprise.

They were heavy things of gold, embossed with a design which she did not notice at first. But as she turned her wrist and the second link came into place, it caught the light and she saw the crest and knew it.

"Oh! . . ." For some reason she was taken aback. "Were you there? What year?" She let go the wrist and looked up at his face.

He said, "It wasn't my Alma Mater—thank God! But for thirty-six battle-scarred months I was a member of the Faculty." He tapped one of the links. "These were given to me by a small and unselect body of undergraduates who thought they liked me and pretended to like my teaching. I wear them because I lost my Woolworth pair."

He wasn't looking at her, so she stared at his profile. She said:

"Now you're still *another* person! It's very disconcerting."

He turned his head quickly to look at her, but he didn't speak.

"That's the third one of you I've met tonight," she said, with a vague feeling that angels would fear this going. "But not one of them explains the real mystery."

"What mystery?" The words seemed to come out reluctantly, and she had a momentary sensation of triumph which was very pleasant.

She said, "Come out from behind the mask, Houdini! I mean I simply cannot understand what you're doing here. Oh, I remember what you said after dinner about Fitzgerald being your business and the greatest 'chaser in history. But none of that explains why . . ."

She was going to say more. But there came an interruption—the slow steady sound of Fitzgerald's hooves and the voice of Sherry, ringing with a master-craftsman's self-importance.

"Oh, Mr. Olivant! He's kinda dry now. . . . But I can easy stroll him some more. . . ."

Olivant left her quickly. She tilted her head back to look at the blue-black arching of the sky and then around at the sharply rolling shoulders of the hills which swelled at either side of her restricted horizon. She wondered what she was feeling and whether she liked it.

She seemed to be somewhere close to a decision when the train of thought or sensation was broken by the sight and sound of Olivant and the stallion and Sherry as they came across the yard toward her.

She stood aside and watched as Olivant stripped off the sheet and brushed the straw to the ground and then smoothed the now-dry coat with his hands and put back the sheet and girthed and buckled it.

She pushed open the box-door for him and he muttered thanks and led the horse in while Sherry, affronted by the mess of straw, bent quickly to gather it up.

She said, "Sherry: hadn't you better go? We don't want you to lose all that beauty sleep," and he grinned at her and went on with the work and was carrying the litter

away in an armful when Olivant came out and bolted the lower half of the door behind him. He walked after the boy without a word—and she leaned back against the barn wall and listened to Fitzgerald as he stamped around for a moment and then settled down at the hay-rack with a steady and peaceful and rhythmic munching.

Several minutes passed. She stood suddenly upright, conscious that it was time for her to be offended at being left alone. She looked around and could see no one, nor hear anything except the steady munching of the stallion. Rather reluctantly, she walked slowly toward the driveway. She should, she supposed, be affronted and walking quickly, but somehow she couldn't manage it.

She was past the hitching rail and out of the yard when she heard quick footsteps. She didn't look around, but in a moment he was beside her and falling into step. He had his coat on again, and succeeded in looking exactly as if there had been no interlude of violent labor.

He said, "Sorry. I was just talking to the little coon and getting my coat. I tipped him, in case you should wonder."

She was still walking slowly. "I wouldn't," she said. "There are too many other things to wonder about."

The white, glaring stable-light was lost behind them now and the moon had come into its own. The gravel of the drive was silver, and the trees and the hills were black. She studied them and found herself moving still more slowly.

He said, "Have a cigarette?" and stopped walking and pulled out the case again and offered it to her.

"Thanks," she said—and waited while he found matches and gave her a light and took one himself. They didn't move on.

She said, "I'm very curious. What did you teach—and why did you stop?"

They started to walk again: she didn't know which of them had begun the movement.

"If you have to know," he said, "it was what they call Social Anthropology, meaning what chaps do and why they do it. And I stopped because the procreators of my chaps didn't seem to like what I was telling their offspring. Unfortunately there was no scandal whatsoever: I resigned four and a half minutes before I could be fired. . . . That's a reasonable *précis*—and I'd much rather talk about something else."

He halted again—and Janet found with surprise that they had reached the mouth of the pathway to the house. She glanced up at the house itself. It glowered bleakly—and she envied him the shining, homelike little tack-room.

She said, "I'm sorry. I really am. I didn't mean to be nosey." She laid her hand on his arm.

Before she could take it away, his hand came over it. She didn't move—and they stood there. They looked at each other. She couldn't see his eyes: they were hidden in shadow.

"God *damn* that horse of mine!" He said it with a sudden violence which startled her.

But after an instant she smiled. "Why?" she said, and was sure she knew.

But he said, "Before he got himself into trouble, I didn't know you at all—and everything was wonderful. . . ."

She pulled her hand free, roughly. "Have I deteriorated so much in half an hour?"

There was a silence. He looked as if he were going to smile, but didn't. He said at last:

"My dear girl—what's experiment for strangers and adventure for friends is active poison for acquaintances!" He turned away from her. "See you in the morning," he said over his shoulder—and was gone.

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## Chapter Seven

GREY light tinged the windows, and Janet rolled over onto her back. She pulled her watch from under the pillow and peered at it. It was a few minutes after five. She must stay awake now, or she'd be late at the stables—and she wasn't going to be late. She was going to be earlier than he was.

Her head ached and her mouth was dry. She supposed she must have a hangover. But she'd have been all right if she'd been able to sleep properly, instead of alternating restless dozes with periods of angry, futile thought.

And here she was, thinking again, her mind racing around and around in the same squirrel cage. . . .

So there were only three possible states of relationship for a man and a woman, were there? They could be strangers or acquaintances or friends. . . . They couldn't, of course, ever be in love! That wouldn't occur to him, would it! He probably didn't admit the word, even! Perhaps he'd never heard of it. . . .

"Oh, *damn!*" she said aloud. "Damn everything!"

She put her hands behind her head and lay staring up at the beamed ceiling. She held herself very still and strove to drive the foggiest from her aching head and confront whatever facts she could find.

She found two which were really one: she wasn't at all



sure she liked him: she was afraid she was in love with him.

She was walking down to the stables at five-thirty-five. There was no sound except the tentative, new-day enthusiasm of the birds and there was still a sharp chill in the air, which was light and heady, and she felt oddly tremulous and unsure of herself.

But the silence from the yard encouraged her as she approached. If she were first, she could be very busy when he appeared—and that would definitely help.

She passed the nearer barn and turned into the yard—and halted in her tracks.

Olivant was nowhere to be seen—but she wasn't the first. S. Robinson was there, clad in the same blue sweater, but with his legs encased in a brand-new pair of Levi overalls beneath which showed a pair of yellow, high-heeled vaquero boots. He had his back to her, and was very much occupied.

He was standing at the door of Fitzgerald's box. He was on tiptoe, and he was reaching up, vainly, with an arm above his head. The tips of his fingers were a bare inch away from what they sought to grip, which was something dangling from Fitzgerald's mouth.

The stallion's head was deliberately, tantalizingly high, and the gleaming eyes which looked down each side of the ebony muzzle seemed full of wicked laughter. His lips were rolled back, and the white young teeth gripped the knotted body of his treasure, while the rest of it hung free in dreamlike improbability—the foot of a pink silk stocking.

She went nearer to them. She said, "Hello, Sherry, where in the world did he get that . . ." and then cut off the

speech as the boy, desperate, suddenly jumped upwards, grabbing.

She was afraid for a moment that the horse might be startled and crack his poll upon the top of the door-frame. But she needn't have been worried. The black head flirted gently upward, missing the wood by a fraction of an inch—and the snatching brown fingers missed their goal by the same small tormenting gulf which had separated them from it all the time.

It was very neat, and very funny. And she wanted to laugh.

The boy turned a rueful face. "He's got mah dust-cap, Miss! Jest snatched it off sneaky-like when I wasn't lookin'." He reached up the futile arm again—and the laughter inside her broke bonds and bubbled over.

The tackroom door opened and slammed shut and Olivant came down the board steps and crossed the yard toward them.

He wore jodhpurs and a thin high-necked sweater of bright yellow. His body and walk were even younger than she had remembered, but the lean dark face was drawn, and there were faint circles beneath the eyes. He saw her laughing and smiled. He pushed Sherry out of the way and held up his hand.

"Come on, Fagin," he said. "Drop it."

The stallion stood motionless for a moment, his head still high, his eyes still gleaming, the ridiculous stocking-foot still hanging from between his teeth. But the man didn't move again, nor speak—and very slowly the black head came down and the white shield on its forehead swelled to its right proportions and the gleam seemed to leave the eyes and the teeth opened reluctantly and the

little limp pile of silk dropped into the palm outstretched to receive it.

Janet still laughed. The laughter jarred her aching head but she didn't mind. She was grateful to the black Fitzgerald, intensely grateful. She had laughed—and Olivant had smiled because she had laughed.

The willows rustled as they brushed through them—and the great shoulder of rock bulged out ahead, at the end of the cleft—and then Mac had to take to the water again and lift his legs high with a great splashing.

But this morning she wasn't alone. There was an even greater splashing behind her—and she felt an excited pleasure in the surprise which was in store, when in a moment they would round the rock, for her companion; for this particular companion. It was a proprietary, explorer's pleasure; the sort of pleasure Captain Cook might have felt if he'd ever been able to show the first South Sea Island to Dampier or someone.

She rounded the rock and put Mac up the bank. The sun shone suddenly upon her and the whole valley bloomed in front of her eyes, even more lovely, she thought, because she had known it was there and knew what to look for and where to look for it—the winding of the stream with its fringe of pale green willow, the arching line of the hills upon either side, the trees sweeping in emerald waves down to the water ahead, the live and deliberate brown of the ride which stretched away in front of her, the multicolored tapestry of the mosses. . . .

She stopped McTavish at the top of the bank and turned in the saddle as Fitzgerald, heavily dramatizing the whole business of the water, was persuaded to leave it and plunged violently up the slope and flung himself about and danced

and threw his head and cracked his nostrils and rolled his eyes. He was a handful—but he was so beautiful in movement that Janet watched him spellbound. Beneath her, McTavish shifted impatiently: he had not been so well-mannered this morning, he seemed irritable and anxious always to be going faster than she wanted.

She found that she had stopped considering the stallion and was watching his rider. He was strong and sure and lithe as a wand which one might cut from the willow trees that waved by the stream. He was gentle yet severe, solid yet light, relaxed yet quickly reacting.

He reminded her, suddenly, of Bruce. He was taller—and perhaps more graceful. He was more obviously made of whipcord and steel. He was riding with a longer stirrup than Bruce had ever used. He didn't look like Bruce in any limb or feature or movement—but he looked like Bruce.

The stallion stood quiet at last, and Olivant stared all about him at the valley.

He said, "You didn't exaggerate, did you?" And then, after a moment, "In fact, you understated."

McTavish grunted and pulled at her. She let him walk on and Fitzgerald walked beside him. She wanted to speak, but as they came down the slope onto the soft, firm going of the ride, Mac demanded all her attention. He remembered his gallop and thought he was going to have another. He tried to break and kept looking sideways at Fitzgerald and even laid his ears flat back to his head and reached out to bite at the black neck.

"Mac!" she said, and jerked him sharply back—and set herself to the task of making him walk.

Olivant eased the stallion away—and after several busy moments, she induced McTavish to give up his ideas and

had him settled down to his long, swinging walk. But her head was aching badly, and she was hot and uncomfortable. She hoped she hadn't looked too ungainly while he'd been chopping about and shaking her up with that fifth leg.

And then it happened; happened exactly as she had dreaded it would happen. Olivant rode up beside her again—and he said, casually:

"Your brother be out here soon?"

She drew a deep breath. She said, "He's dead," in a stiff flat voice which she desperately hoped would save her from any forced and formal speech of sympathy.

There was a small silence.

"Since when?" said Olivant. "Or shall I shut up?" There was no expression in his voice at all.

"Three weeks. Nearly four." She still looked straight ahead of her. "England. Eagle Squadron."

He said, "There are many worse ways to die." He said it with a slow deliberation, so that she knew he meant exactly what the words meant.

She was grateful. After a moment, she turned her head and smiled at him. She didn't say anything—and they rode on for nearly a mile in silence. The sun shone buttercup-yellow and the soft earth broken by the horses' hooves smelt headily, like a strangely exciting mixture of champagne and decay. The leather of the saddles squeaked in odd harmony with the chirruping of unseen birds and the clinking of the big-ringed racing snaffles. A monster frog hopped unconcerned across their path, and once a jack-rabbit, with a noise worthy at least of an antelope, broke from the green thicket on their left and shot by in a tawny flash. McTavish threw his head and *farupped* with his nostrils and jiggled a little and then resumed the swinging rhythm of his walk—but Fitzgerald seized upon this wonderful

excuse for satisfying his innate desire to be on-stage: he was affronted, he was mortally terrified! He leapt sideways like a ballerina. He snorted. He stood up on his hind legs and reared enormous beside the startled Janet. He brought his forefeet to ground again with a slapping sound and raked forward with his beautiful head and managed to get it down and bucked three times, like a rocking horse.

Olivant clapped him on the neck and he sobered himself and settled down. But now he walked with small and mincing steps, as if he were afraid of sullyng his feet with the earth, or perhaps of burning them.

Janet looked at him, and then at the man on his back. They both seemed to be laughing silently.

She laughed herself. "He's on-stage *all* the time, isn't he?"

"And a terrible ham!" said Olivant. He looked at her, and the smile faded from his face and she met his eyes with hers and felt a quick new tumult inside her.

She took her eyes away and pretended to study the country and found with surprise that they had nearly reached the end of the ride. The trees were closing in about them now and in a moment they would see the camouflaged gate. She thought of it with distaste: she didn't want to jump it this morning—not with Olivant and Fitzgerald around; not with the headache which kept pounding at her temples; not if McTavišh, as he certainly would, were going into that sudden top gear and nearly break her back with it; not when she might shut her eyes again and be seen with them shut.

Olivant said, "Where're we going, by the way? Or aren't we?"

She almost replied that she hadn't any idea and was on the point of checking Mac and suggesting that they turn

back. But she suddenly saw the brush-covered gate, and it wasn't barring the way. It stood wide open and inviting. She said:

"Let's go on a bit. There's a farm along here. I found it the other day—and it was sort of mysterious. I'm curious about it—there wasn't anybody anywhere around—except a parrot."

He said something about having noticed the fences and the cultivated land, and they rode on in silence again. It was a good silence, though—and she thought, suddenly, how few the people were she could be silent with. Or to. . . . Because if you talked to people, why shouldn't you be silent to them? As she was now being silent to this man—and he to her, she hoped. But perhaps he wasn't, perhaps he wasn't conscious of her. Perhaps he was as remote as his dark profile seemed, thinking dark thoughts which were all his own.

They rode through the gate and came out of the shade of the trees. The stocky bay horse wasn't in the pasture this morning—but the black-and-white cow was there, surrounded by three or four others, all smaller and dun-coloured.

She said, "Let's trot," with a sidelong glance at the stallion. "Or won't he?"

Olivant said nothing—but the next moment they were trotting and she was having difficulty to prevent Mac from breaking into a canter, so fast a pace did the stallion set. She was amazed and said so when they had reached the belt of trees which hid the farm buildings and were forced to walk again.

Olivant smiled, but still didn't speak. They entered the shade of the trees, and Janet suddenly realized that she felt better; much better. The pain in her head had gone,

and the dryness had left her mouth. And she remembered something. She said, suddenly:

"Did I say there wasn't anyone about when I was here? That's wrong—there was. But I don't think he belonged. A weird, frightening creature with a beard and long hair. He was milking a cow—and he ran away when I rode up. I wonder. . . ."

She broke off. There was a sudden crackling in the undergrowth—and she turned her head toward the sound and then flung out a pointing hand.

"Look!" she said sharply. "Look! There he is now!"

But the gaunt figure, bent almost double under the weight of the large and bulging sack which it bore across straining shoulders, seemed to melt out of her vision almost as soon as she had seen it, leaving only an unlikely memory of wild tossing hair and streaming beard and earth-brown animal nakedness.

"Did you see?" she said. "Did you see it?"

He nodded. He was still looking after the vanished apparition.

He laughed. "Basketmaker survival, huh?" He turned his head and looked at her. "Notice the horses?"

She stared at him. "No. What d'you mean?"

"They didn't react," he said. "Funny. Fitz ought to've hit the roof."

It was odd, she thought. Very odd, now she came to think of it. Even Mac should have paid some attention to that sudden movement in the underbrush. She was going to reply, but before she could speak she heard a sound which momentarily moved all thought of anything else from her head. It was a man's voice, singing. It was a pure tenor voice. It was, quite apparently to her over-trained ear, completely untrained. But it was one of those



rarely-heard but often talked-about voices which seem all the better for their lack of schooling. It was a beautiful voice. It was strong and sweet and virile and completely unaffected. It was joyous and powerful and easy and utterly true. And it was singing a happy, curiously-rhythmed tune which was like nothing she'd ever heard before.

She said, "Oh, listen!" and involuntarily brought Mc-Tavish to a standstill. She saw that Fitzgerald had been stopped as well and gave herself up to the pleasure of the sound.

The song came to an end, and she grew conscious of other sounds; the creaking and jingle of harness; the scraping and stamping of horses' feet; the splashing of water into metal.

She looked at Olivant, and without a word they started their horses forward together and made their way through the trees and soon could see glimpses of the sun-washed yard and buildings.

"Inhabited today," he said. "One Latin inhabitant, anyway. Northern Mexican who plays tricks with folk-music. Good tricks."

"I *thought* it was Spanish." She was still warm from the voice. "I want to see him!"

They came out of the trees. The gate to the yard was open and they rode through it—and a man who stood by the wagon which rested on its tongue before the central door of the barn turned to watch them.

He was a thick, square man—and he stood squarely. He held a square-tined pitchfork, and his feet were planted apart and squarely in line with his wide square shoulders. He wore a very white shirt, squarely open at the neck, and faded, light-blue overalls beneath which showed square-toed boots. He looked as if he had been sketched in a

right-angled frame which had been imperfectly erased. Janet felt she could even see the lines of it.

"It wasn't *him*!" she whispered.

They rode toward him, and he waited for them. He seemed to be looking at the horses more than their riders.

They came close and pulled up and Olivant said, "Good morning," and Janet smiled politely and saw that the face was as square as the body: it might have been drawn with a ruler, so rigidly, correctly angular were the lines of forehead and cheeks and chin. He was deeply, permanently tanned and his eyes shone very blue from the network of wrinkles which radiated from their corners. He didn't reply to the salutation in words, and he didn't smile. He nodded, once to Janet, once to Olivant. They were non-committal nods—but very certainly, they were not rude. After them, he lowered his gaze to the horses again, flicking it quickly over McTavish and returning it to dwell upon Fitzgerald.

Olivant said, "The gate up there was open, so we came through. We're neighbors. Stabled up at the Inn."

"Oh-ah." The voice was deep—and Janet thought *square* might fit it very well as an adjective. She looked around, wondering where the singer could be.

Olivant said, "Do you farm this yourself?" and received another nod and then two words.

"My land," said the farmer, and began to walk around Fitzgerald with his head on one side, looking like a judge in a conformation class.

"Fine stud!" he said at last—and then, "Wonderful stud!" He seemed surprised at having said so much.

And then, inside the barn, from which vague sounds of horse and man had been coming, the voice started again, this time upon a gay, rhumba-rhythmed tune to which there were many rapid, pattering words.

The farmer looked quickly at Janet; then spoke to Olivant.

"Lady know Spanish?" he asked.

She saw that Olivant was smiling broadly, and that the farmer was anxious. She was annoyed with them both: she wanted to listen.

She said, "No," rather sharply—and forgot all about them and gave her attention to the voice.

The singer came to the doorway of the barn, still singing. He carried a bucket in one hand and had a mess of harness slung over the other shoulder. He was as beautiful as his voice. He was young and slim and strong with a soft Grecian outline of strength. He was stripped to the waist, and the pure olive of his skin shone softly. His head was small and perfectly shaped, and blue-black hair clung to the skull in softly curling waves. His features were straight and regular and as pure in outline as the rest of him. He looked like Hermes, Janet thought.

He stood stock-still, staring at the strangers. The song died on his lips. He seemed both fascinated and afraid.

"Works here," said the farmer. "Good boy. Mexican—Peppy Morales."

Olivant smiled—and raised his voice in a little stream of Spanish and the figure in the doorway relaxed, setting down the bucket and slipping the harness over a hook in the wall and smiling shyly with a flash of white teeth.

"What did you say to him?" Janet said. "Ask him to sing again."

Olivant looked at her. "He won't. Although I told him you didn't know Spanish and couldn't possibly understand what happened to Aunt Maria at the Fiesta."

She couldn't hide her disappointment.

"Does he sing all the time?" she said to the farmer—

and then, as she was answered by a square smile and a nod, "Does he speak English?"

Another nod. She put her heels to Mac's sides and walked him over to the barn and stopped by the wagon tongue. The boy stood uncertainly in the doorway, looking up at her.

She said, "Thank you for the singing. I wish you hadn't stopped."

The teeth flashed again, but a dull, purplish flush crept up under the glowing olive skin of his neck and cheeks.

Belatedly, she realized the full meaning of what Olivant had said to her. "Please don't worry." She smiled. "I don't understand Spanish. I was talking about . . . about your music."

The flush died away, and he smiled again. He said:

"Thank you. I . . . I guess I just like to sing." His voice was soft and hesitant and the English words were delightfully tinged by velvet sibilants.

"I hope you go on liking it," she said. "Especially when I'm around."

He made a curious little gesture with his hand, half thanks, half salute—and wholly courteous. He disappeared into the dark recesses of the barn, and Janet turned Mac about and was surprised to see that Olivant had dismounted. One arm through the stallion's rein, he stood talking earnestly to the farmer, who every now and then would nod squarely and once even made a measuring gesture with his hands.

She rode over to them. The farmer smiled at her and Olivant said, "We've been invited to coffee."

She said, "Swell!" and really meant it. She hoped there might be some sort of food as well. She dismounted, and they followed the farmer into the barn and found two stalls

with pillar-reins and hitched the horses to them and loosened their girths. Somewhere at the far end of the building they could hear the boy moving about, but he didn't sing again.

As they went out into the sunlight the grey cat passed them in the doorway. Janet turned to watch it—and saw that it went straight to McTavish like an old friend and began to weave in and out between his forelegs, rubbing itself against each one luxuriously. She thought: *Good for you, Mac! There's someone who isn't dazzled by sex and a black coat.*

She smiled to herself and hurried out to join the waiting men, and they walked over to the mulberry and through its shade to the gate and across the little garden to the house. Two children, a boy and a girl of perhaps five and four years old, were playing upon the porch steps; but they went quietly indoors when they saw the strangers. The parrot cage still hung in the same place—and a sudden voice came screeching from it.

"Hey, there!" it squawked. "Hey, there!" The words were followed by several rasping, unintelligible sounds—and then by the phrase, "How do, folks?" uttered with mincing clarity.

They were at the foot of the porch-steps—and the farmer halted abruptly. He turned to face them. "Forgot," he said. "Name's Abel Craddock."

Olivant said gravely, "This is Miss Elliot," and Janet shook the hard square hand held out to her.

"Happy," said Abel Craddock and turned to Olivant and heard his name and repeated the handshaking process and the word. He led them up onto the porch and found chairs for them and was making for the center door to the house when the parrot screeched again, very loudly.

"Hey, Minnie—*Min-nie!*"

Janet laughed, and Craddock smiled broadly. "Saves trouble," he said—and the door opened and a woman came out onto the porch.

She was short, and as round as her husband was square. She had round brown eyes and a smooth round face, and her body, covered from throat to ankle by a flowered-print smock, was round with the curves of pregnancy. She stood and smiled at them with her hands clasped over her stomach, and Janet thought she had never seen a face so free from guile or its possibility.

The farmer stood beside her and achieved a general introduction with the effect of having used only three words. She beamed at the visitors and bent her head to them in turn and didn't speak at all. Her smile was gentle and happy and semi-circular.

"Min!" squawked the parrot. "Hey, Min! Coffee, Min!"

They all laughed then, and Craddock said, "Saves trouble," again and his wife went back into the house.

A silence fell—and Janet made conversation. She said:

"I rode by day before yesterday, Mr. Craddock. But you weren't here."

"No one here. Town. Peppy working back fields." He was standing by the cage, scratching the parrot's neck. He drew a deep breath and plunged into the labyrinth of conversation again. "Saw hoof-marks. Wondered."

Janet said, "There was someone here, Mr. Craddock—a strange-looking man with a beard and long hair; and almost nothing else except a dog. He was milking a cow, and ran away when I rode up."

"The Possell." Craddock seemed amused. "No harm t' him. Lives in a cave. Up by the falls."

"Oh. . . ." She wondered what a *possell* was. "Why did he run away? Was he *stealing* the milk?"

Craddock shook his head. "Likes t' think he is. We leave it f'r him. Happy that way."

Olivant said, "We saw him just now. He had a sack full of something heavy."

The door opened and Mrs. Craddock came out. She was carrying a circular tray upon which were coffee pot and cream pitcher and cups and a vast round cake. Olivant made a movement toward her, but her husband was beside her already. He took the tray from her and set it down upon a table and she moved over to it and began to fill the cups.

Olivant looked at Craddock. "What was in the sack?" he said.

"Veg'tables. Potatoes, turnips, suchlike. From the store-barn." Craddock began to pass around coffee. "Once—twice a month, we don't snap the lock."

His wife had been cutting the cake, and he went back to the table. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and mopped at his forehead.

"Talking too much," he said, and picked up the platter and handed it around.

The coffee was good and the cake was delicious. Janet said, "Oh, it's marvelous!" and took another piece when Craddock brought it and turned to the woman, who had settled herself in a rocker and was placidly surveying them.

"Good cook, Min," said Craddock—and went over to Olivant, who had somehow become possessed of pencil and paper and seemed to be sketching something; he looked up at Janet and said, "Schooling fences," and immediately went back to his drawing.

Janet said, "Aren't you going to have any cake, Mrs. Craddock?" and wondered whether her own smile were be-

coming round: she could feel a sort of tugging at the corners of her mouth.

The woman shook her head. The smile had left her mouth but was still shining in the brown eyes. She pursed her lips and patted the roundness of her belly. She sat and rocked gently back and forth.

Olivant was still busy with his drawing, and the farmer was looking intently over his shoulder. In the quietness the gurgling of the stream came very clearly to Janet's ears: it seemed to bind together all the other little sounds from the farmyard and the trees, and the back of the house where the children must be playing. It was both accompaniment and theme, and blended all the sounds with the sunlight and the colors of flowers and grass and foliage until she did not seem to be able to separate what she heard from what she saw.

She had thought of making talk—but words seemed suddenly ridiculous and unimportant. You could be close to people, and contented to be with them, without producing any series of inadequate, formalistic noises from your lips. She was close to this woman—and warmly happy. There was a strange, sedate comradeship between them: they were strangers, but they were fellow humans.

It was almost an hour before they rode away. They were out of the farmyard and in among the trees before they spoke, and then Janet said:

"Weren't they swell? . . . They make me jealous."

There was a silence for a moment, and she thought he wasn't going to answer and then was surprised when he did.

He said, "They know what they're doing—and they do it well. They work with the earth and eat what it gives



them and breed. They're happy because they're friends and like what they're doing."

She turned her head to look at him. They were still among the trees, and the sunlight and the shadow striped his face so that she couldn't see any expression on it. She probably wouldn't have been able to anyway, she thought—and smiled to herself. She felt extraordinarily different since they had come here: she felt free and adventurous—and strangely excited with a sort of glad-to-be-alive excitement which reminded her of childhood but had nothing childish in it.

She glanced at him again—but he wasn't looking at her. He was doing something to the neck-strap of the stallion's martingale. She said:

"I think you ought to borrow a dictionary—and look up the word 'love.' Your vocabulary doesn't seem to include it."

He looked at her now.

"You borrow the dictionary," he said. "You'll find the primary meaning's 'warm affection' or 'fondness'—which is a hell of a lot less than what I mean by friendship, especially friendship which includes sexual compatibility. I refuse to subscribe to the modern—you might call it the rotogravure—definition, which seems to be a seismic upheaval of the emotions, of faery origin, all naked except for the ivy-leaves!"

She wished they were out in the sunlight so that she could see his face.

"I quit," she said. "I quit!" She laughed. "I can't argue with you. . . . I'll just go on thinking."

They came out into the clear strip by the pasture. The horses were walking steadily, their noses set earnestly homeward. From somewhere beyond the fence came the tinkling

of cow-bells. She thought: It's funny how different I feel. I didn't want to talk at all on the way here—and we didn't. Now I want to—and we probably will.

She said suddenly, "What d'you suppose *possell* means? That was what he called the hairy horror, wasn't it?"

He didn't turn his head, but she could see the faint beginnings of the one-sided smile.

"There were twelve of 'em. And they nearly all had beards. One ate honey in a wilderness, and locust-beans. They keep creeping into steel-engravings in respectable rooming-houses."

She stared at him and then laughed again. 'She wondered how she could possibly have missed it. She said, "It must be wonderful to be right *all* the time!"

The smile crept further up his face. "Oh—you get used to it," he said.

They were halfway to the thick tree-belt where the gate was. She found herself wishing that it was shut, so that they'd have to jump it. After all, he'd let her go first if she wanted to and then he couldn't see if she did happen to close her eyes. She thought of suggesting a canter, and then decided that talk was much easier walking. She said:

"You know, somebody ought to do something about that boy."

He turned toward her. "What boy?"

She was lost in memory. "That's the most perfect natural voice I ever heard!"

"Don't," he said loudly. "Don't say it!"

She started. "Don't say what?"

"That he's being wasted."

"But he is!" She was vehement. "I know just the man, though, to put him where he ought to be."

"Wouldn't that be fine! . . . Big Pepe Morales on the

posters. Little Pepe Morales on the platform—in a black coat too tight for him and a tie which buckles at the back.” There was a savage edge to his voice. “Artistic Pepe Morales, with sweaty hands, ‘rendering’ Pagliacci. Not a dry lens in the hall! . . . And where’s the boy who works with the sun on his body and sings *Tia Maria* to his horses? Where’s the boy who gets beautifully drunk for twenty cientos every pay-day and enjoys his women where he finds ‘em? Where’s the boy whose friends see life as he does—a glorious corrida of sunshine and muchachas, with plenty of tequila and not too much work? Where’s the boy who knows what he’s doing and likes to do it? Where’s he gone?”

She pursed up her lips. “Phew!” she said, and smiled at him.

He didn’t speak: he was fiddling again with Fitzgerald’s martingale.

She said, “Well, you’ve saved Pepe. . . . You’re very convincing.”

They entered the second belt of trees as she spoke, and his face was in shadow and she couldn’t see it plainly. She glanced ahead and saw that the gate was still open.

He said, “I’m lecturing again next week. At the Y.M.C.A. in San Louis Obispo. Do come!”

She laughed. She felt well and light and very strong. She didn’t understand the feeling: it was almost like being slightly and rightly tight—but it was better than that.

They rode through the gate and then on toward the beginning of the ride.

“Look,” she said, “you keep harping on people ‘knowing what they’re doing’—and I’m curious. Do you know what you’re doing? Because I can’t make it out at all!”

The smile touched his mouth again, and vanished. “I’m

making the greatest steeplechase horse in the history of racing."

"You said that last night. But why?"

"Because that's what I want to do, what I know how to do, and what I have the material for doing."

"But . . . but it doesn't seem to make sense. A man of your . . . your history and . . . and brains and—damn it! I'm going to say *background* in a minute. . . ."

He smiled again—and this time not to himself but to her. At her, and *with* her. He said:

"You mean why—if I *am* going to create the greatest steeplechaser in the history of racing—why do I do it in a hole-in-the-corner stable, and without a groom and an exercise-boy and a trainer and a couple of secretaries and a manager? . . . The answer's easy: I have what my mother would have called 'extremely limited funds at my disposal.'"

"You're an irritating person, aren't you? . . . I don't mean anything of the sort—and you know it. I mean . . . I mean . . . I mean why have you decided to devote your life exclusively to Horse?"

The trees were thinning now, and she could see the beginning of the ride ahead of them and in her ears was the gurgling of the small river. She was quiet—and she didn't even look at him: she didn't want to do anything which might prevent him from answering.

She had just decided that he wasn't going to answer, when he did, very suddenly and without preamble. He said:

"I don't see why I should tell you. I don't see why I should tell anyone. I don't think I can put it into words—because I don't think there are any words which can really translate it. I've never tried—because I've either never been

asked, or didn't care to answer the person who asked me. I forget which."

He hesitated, and she held her breath, wanting him to go on.

He said, "For me—I mean to my eyes and mind and shape of thought—Horse is superior to Man. I think I've always thought that, but have only just lately come to realize it fully."

He stopped abruptly, and she said, "You don't mean that."

"Why shouldn't I? The best horse is better to look at than the best man—and he's cleaner and braver and far more companionable. He's a straighter, less complicated creature than Man; and he's been around several million years longer and knows, basically, far better what he's doing. He has no sentimentality whatsoever, and just enough sentiment. . . ."

"You'd better stop," she said. "That's all phoney—every word of it!" She was angry. "If you don't want to explain, don't; just tell me to mind my own business. But don't be . . . be spurious!"

He turned his head quickly to look at her, but she met his eyes defiantly—and suddenly saw there was no anger in them. She couldn't tell what was in them: they were surprised, but surprise wasn't all.

He said, "I'm very sorry," and didn't sound amused or patronizing—or anything except flatly honest. The momentary anger left her.

"Here's a stab at it," he said suddenly. "And no more after that. I've studied Horse ever since I can remember. I've studied Man, intensively, for twenty years. I know a great deal about both. I don't want to study Man any more—but I can go on very happily with Horse. . . . This isn't

very good, but I'm trying. . . . Why can I go on happily with Horse? Because he's the last clean adventure in the world; the last link between utility and romance. Because he's always beautiful. Because he pleases the nose and the touch and the ear as well as the eye. Because he can give me more honest, intelligent mental and physical labor in a day than any man or book or machine can in a week. Because he can reward me for the labor with moments of purely satisfying excitement which are worth a year of any other sort of gratification in my experience. Because, in those moments and at all other times, I'm working not only on and for but with him. Because he's a business and a partner at the same time. Because . . . oh, to hell with it, that's the best I can do—and none of it even scrapes the surface."

She realized that she was staring at him and deliberately shifted her gaze. She said:

"I think it does a lot more than that. I think you did a swell job. But I think I could put it much shorter."

"The Craddock School of Verbal Economy!" He was smiling; she knew without looking. "Go ahead."

She was silent for a moment, shuffling her thoughts into order.

"Here it is," she said at last. "There's a virulent horse-bug in your make-up; Man—including Woman—hasn't treated you the way you think you ought to be treated; and Horse—especially that horse—feeds your ego satisfactorily." She broke off abruptly. "Golly! That's rude, isn't it?"

They were coming out of the trees now and onto the ride. The sun dazzled her and she had to screw up her eyes as she peered at him.

"Did you say shrewd?" He was laughing. He slapped

Fitzgerald's sleek black shoulder and spoke to him. "Did you hear what she called you? An ego-feeder, my lad!"

The stallion put his head down, and then threw it as high as the rings of the martingale would let him. For the first time he broke his walk and began to dance and jig, switching his rump to this side and the other, arching his great crest so that the little racing mane blew out coquetishly, making elaborate play with his bit. He succeeded in looking coy and dangerous and preposterously beautiful all in the same breath.

McTavish turned his head, seemed to stare at the performance for a contemptuous moment—and then grunted loudly.

Olivant said, "Well, I know what you mean, old boy," and then began to take a sudden interest in the going and the long, slightly curving stretch of the ride. He looked alternately down at the brown, sandy earth and then, his eyes shaded by his hand, at the vista ahead.

He spoke suddenly, as if a thought had just occurred to him. He said:

"By the way: your own case takes quite a bit of understanding, doesn't it? A well-known and beautiful pianist damages her hand and has to give up her profession. So where does one find her? In a hole-in-the-corner stable, looking after a grand old 'chaser while she wonders why other people are doing the same thing. Not a very likely story—but strangely true."

Janet laughed at him. "You've forgotten. You know what I'm doing. You told me. I'm running away."

He grinned. "I can't argue with you. . . . I'll just go on thinking."

"What about?" she said.

"A breeze for this gentleman." He seemed to scan the

ride again, and she watched him. "I didn't intend to work him to-day—but I'm changing my mind. There must be six furlongs left of this."

Janet felt a sudden surge of excitement; a heightened resurgence of the feeling of lightness and well-being which had come over her as they started homeward; the feeling which had made her wish the gate might be shut so that they would have to jump it.

"Oh, do!" she said. "How far will you give him?"

He pulled Fitzgerald up and, thrusting a leg forward, lifted the saddle-flap and began to tighten his girths.

"Oh—I'll let him go a half, then start easing him." He had finished with the girths now and was shortening his leathers. "You pull away," he said. "Stand yours back there somewhere, and turn him around till we've started. Then he won't get ideas."

"What d'you think we are?" She was happily indignant. "Park hacks?" She began to tighten girths herself. "Mac may not be as nearly ready as Fitzgerald, but he's good for a blow—and it'll be good for him."

Olivant looked at her in surprise. "Been working him, have you? I didn't know."

McTavish was standing very still, extraordinarily still. She could feel a trembling tenseness in his whole body. She said, without looking up from the girth billets: "I haven't—yet. But I have to start sometime." She felt he was about to speak and wouldn't let him. "Don't fuss! I'll pull him out after a quarter." She was immensely pleased by the businesslike way this came out.

"Can you hold him all right?" There was doubt in his voice, and something which might be concern.

She laughed. She felt sure and happy and tremendously excited. She said:



"Now listen—will you please get it into your head that for some reason McTavish *likes* me!" She was surprised to find how near she had come to mentioning Bruce. "He may act up with other people—but never with me."

Olivant thrust his feet into the adjusted irons. They were very short. He said, "Okay. Break from here?" He was taking a racing hold of the broad, rubber-covered rein.

She settled herself more firmly in the saddle. She wondered whether she would shorten her stirrups and decided against it. The trembling stillness beneath her was very curious: she'd never felt anything like it.

She said, "All right with me," and shortened her own rein, feeling the plaited leather softly rough against her palms. She and Mac were on the inner side of the ride, next the stream, and she saw now that Olivant had turned the stallion and was jiggling over, as far as he could go, to the outer edge. Mac was standing slantwise—still tautly immobile. She saw that there were spreading wet patches on each side of his neck, and felt the trembling of his body increase. The excitement grew within her, and she made as if to turn him, so that he would be facing squarely to the way he must run.

But he didn't move.

"Mac!" she said, and increased the pressure of rein and leg.

He moved then, but slowly and stiffly. She had never felt him move like that. If it hadn't been for the vibrant tension of his whole body, the movement would have seemed old and tired and listless. He just picked up his feet, one at a time, and shifted around.

"Ready?" came Olivant's voice—and she glanced toward him.

"All set!" she called back.

*"Right!"*

And then the universe seemed to explode against her face, and there was a frightful, a terrifying racking of her body as Mac went forward in a leap which threw her backwards in the saddle and nearly off it, then seemed, as she fought blindly for balance, to hurl her forward so that her face was almost on his crest.

Somehow, she balanced herself and clamped her knees tighter to the saddle-flaps and, with a purely instinctive movement, wound the rein about her hands. The pull against her straining arms was steady and titanic. The motion beneath her was violent and rough and incredibly powerful. The wind sang in her ears and her eyes were filled with smarting tears of speed and shock, and the air was throbbing with a thundering of hooves against soft firm earth.

She was stunned by the unexpectedness, by the newness, by the extraordinary finality of this force which bore her forward at a speed which seemed, because it was moving sentient beneath her, to be far in excess of any other speed attainable. She couldn't think: she didn't feel. She was here—and the world was rushing blindly at her.

And then—after yards or miles, seconds or hours—the numbness began to leave her mind. She was conscious of a fierce exhilaration. She crouched along the outthrust neck which seemed so much lower than she had ever known it. Her knees, consciously strong now with a strength which amazed her, were welded to the saddle: her weight was upon them and upon her feet in the irons. She was a vital part of a force—and she knew that if she would, she could make it yet more forceful. She tensed her body and crouched lower and instinctively moved her wrists back a little against the ceaseless, inexorable pull and dropped

them onto the sweat-sodden withers and locked them there and stayed motionless like steel with her body but thrust forward with her mind for speed and more speed and felt that the force was suddenly increased; felt that where there had been outer edges of wild and useless straining, now all these had been drawn into and made an integral part of the drive.

The blood sang through her motionless body and there was no more mistiness—except in her eyes. She was Janet and the force was McTavish—McTavish and Janet. And McTavish and Janet could go faster than any other force.

But they hadn't; they hadn't. Ahead of them—away ahead of them—was a dark shape with a cloud of dust and earth behind it which would have whipped into their faces had they been upon the same parallel or near it. And the dark shape was drawing further away. . . . No, it wasn't, it was the same distance away. . . . No, it wasn't, it was coming back to them. . . .

She opened her mouth. She was going to shout to McTavish, to tell him. But the rushing air filled her lungs, half choking her.

And then she saw that the dark shape was slowing; was about to cease movement altogether. That was why they had been overtaking it. . . .

She was Janet Elliot suddenly; Janet Elliot who was breezing a horse she was training; Janet Elliot who was working El McTavish with Richard Olivant's Fitzgerald; Janet Elliot who should know a lot better than to run a half-fit horse like this; Janet Elliot who had so professionally announced that she "would pull out after a quarter."

Fitzgerald was stopped. They were almost level with him. She straightened in her stirrups, standing instead of

crouching. She threw her weight onto her arms, bracing herself against them and hoping, fleetingly, that she wasn't hurting Mac's mouth too much.

"Who-oh!" she said.

And nothing happened; nothing at all.

She increased the force of the tremendous pull which the leverage of standing gave her.

"Who-oh!" she shouted. "Who-oh!"

And nothing happened; nothing at all. The dark shape of Fitzgerald was past now—and the force beneath her was utterly unchecked.

She strained, desperately. She used all her strength and more—and the plunging, inexorable speed was unaffected. Her lungs labored, and a cold hand clenched fiery fingers around her entrails. She strained her back until it felt that her neck must break. She tried to shout, "Mac!"; to appeal to him by name, so that he would know and heed her, so that sanity would come back to him. But the wind of their speed rammed the words back down her throat—and she felt that the implacable force was not McTavish at all but something which had possessed him.

Ahead the rock loomed, sudden and immovable, blocking all further way—and wildly, hopelessly, she strove against the strength which she knew was unconquerable. She could feel already the jar and smash and sick oblivion of the fall. She was weak: her muscles and mind and guts were water.

There was a voice in her head—inside her head or piercing her ears, she didn't know which. Nor care. She heard it dimly, through the blur of panic.

*" . . . throw his head away! Right away. . . . "*

She obeyed. The thin thread which was all that was left of her will tightened and broadened and made her obey.

She slumped down onto the saddle and desperately, with strength which she didn't have, twisted her hands so that the wrapped rein was loose and the leather could slip through her nerveless fingers until it dangled and flapped.

And the speed was checked. There was a faltering—a slowing—a rough, jerky moment of indecision. And then there was no wild incalculable force beneath her, but a blowing, sweating, checking McTavish.

He was in a trot—a walk. He was standing still. Her boneless body slumped forward in the saddle and her cheek fell against the roughness of the lowest lock of his mane; the long lock which old Benjy had called “the mountin’-piece” and which he had always left too long in proportion with the extreme, racy shortness of the rest.

She thought of Benjy . . . for no reason at all. She heard sounds behind her and managed to sit upright. Her back was weak and aching and her legs were trembling and she wanted to vomit.

But she sat fairly straight—and prayed that her face wouldn't betray her too completely.

Olivant rode up beside her. Fitzgerald was dancing as he walked but stood quietly enough when halted. She pretended great interest in Mac's condition and made herself turn in the saddle and glance over him. She couldn't look, now, at the man on Fitzgerald's back. She felt incredibly, achingly foolish.

But Olivant seemed to be looking at McTavish. He said, placidly:

“Lot of horse!” and then, “Fitter than I thought he was.”

She managed to nod; she managed even to think about McTavish and find that he wasn't blowing particularly hard. The sweat was dripping off him, but he stood like a child's pony.

She managed to speak. She said, "He's a stubborn old pig!" and hoped the trembling in her voice wasn't audible.

Olivant was still looking at McTavish, but after a moment, he gathered up his rein and the stallion began to dance once more.

"We ought to get back and give 'em a bath," he said. "I'll go first or we'll be on your heels all the way."

He took Fitzgerald past her: he still didn't seem to have looked at her. She picked up the rein with a shaking, listless hand, and McTavish followed sedately in the stallion's wake.

The sun was hot and the climb up was hard—and Janet felt even worse when they reached the stables. Her knees tried to buckle beneath her when she dismounted, and she felt sore and aching all over, with a headache now added to her woes. But somehow she went through the necessary chores of unsaddling and managed for a while not to speak to Olivant, just answering him by nods or actions. Mercifully, he seemed intent upon the work in hand, and while he hitched a length of hose to the primitive shower behind the tack-room and uncoiled it to reach the wash rack at the far end of the yard, she led Mac about to keep him moving and had time to pull herself together at least enough to defeat the insistent urge to go away somewhere by herself and sit and stare at the ground and wallow in the abysmal depression which had seized her.

She watched listlessly, walking McTavish around and around in small eccentric circles, while Olivant led Fitzgerald onto the wooden slats of the rack, and adjusted the flow of water to the temperature he wanted, and first sponged the eyes and nostrils and dock and then with the hose itself washed the horse all over until he gleamed

deeply, sleekly black like a seal and then took him off the rack and tied him to the side of it and stripped the loose water from the sable coat with a flexible two-handed scraper.

She wondered where she was going to find the strength—or the experience when she came dully to think of it—to do all these things to Mac, and felt a disproportionate surge of relief when the man, having shrouded the semi-dry Fitzgerald in an all-enveloping red-and-white-striped cooler led him toward her and took Mac's halter-rope and pushed the other rope into her hand and said, "Keep him moving, won't you?" and led Mac away to the rack, all as a matter of course.

She walked slowly, having to drive herself to every step. She made a wide circle around both barns—and the stallion, after one playful but agonizing nip at her hair, seemed content to shamble sleepily behind her.

She felt . . . she didn't know how or what she felt, but however or whatever it was, she didn't like it. She didn't mind so much the aching and tiredness of her body; the trouble was the sick, woolly misery of her mind. . . .

She plodded on, past the rack again where Mac was taking his bath with placid good-nature, around the farther barn, onto the drive, past the hitching rail—around and around the circle. There was a thought pressing at the back of her mind, an ugly, painful thought. She didn't want to look at it, to let it come so far up in her consciousness that it would have to be faced. She tried to think about other things—about places, or people, or perfumes, or books she would like to read again. But none of them would do: the protruding thought pushed harder. She gave way then, and tried music—a dangerous trick which so far she had forbidden herself. She played things in her head . . . snatches

of things . . . simple, delicious snatches which anyone could play. She felt better—and grew more ambitious—and filled her head with music. She began, with a perfect, a heaven-provided orchestra behind her in the shadows, to play the Concerto in A Minor of Grieg. . . .

But she couldn't play it any more. She couldn't play it. The hand suddenly seemed to hurt her and she wound the rope around it with savage tightness. She couldn't play—she couldn't do anything!

She came around the end of the barn again and saw that McTavish was off the rack and being scraped. He grunted and kicked out as the edge of the scraper tickled his belly. She halted uncertainly. She didn't speak when Olivant said "He's all right!" She just nodded, and did something with her mouth which was meant to be a smile, and waited while he ran to the tack-room and came out with another cooler and shrouded McTavish in it and gave him to her and took his own horse and felt underneath the woollen sheet to gauge the dryness.

And then they both started walking the circle—Fitzgerald in front, McTavish behind. . . . Around and around. . . . Around and around. . . .

And Mac, the old campaigner, was dry as soon as the stallion—and she thought she would put him away and let him have some water and feed him and then go up to the big bare room and throw herself on the bed and stare.

But it didn't work out like that. She found herself still walking, and letting Mac stop every once in a while to sip from a bucket—only a few swallows at a time because he had so recently been hot—which had been placed in the middle of the yard. She found herself stripping off the cooler and hanging it beside the other one over the hitching-rail and then walking again—around and around . . .



around and around. She found herself, when the walking was over, tying Mac to the hitching rail instead of putting him in his box; tying him and then, with a hoof-pick which was thrust into her hand, picking out his feet and almost groaning with the effort which it took to lift the off-hind—the foot which Bruce had always called the “leery-pad.” She found herself, when this was done and she had listened to a quick ten-word malediction upon the smith who had last shod McTavish, walking wearily in search of body-brush and curry-comb, “because half the purpose of grooming isn’t so much to remove dirt as to give what women call massage.” She found herself—why she didn’t rebel she never knew—using the brush and curry on Mac in a parody of the long, sweeping, heavy-leaning strokes under which Fitzgerald was arching himself. She found herself, after this—and without a word by her or to her—finding a cloth rubber and wadding it into a square and going over the whole great body of her horse again with heavy, smack-and-dragging strokes that brought out a gloss upon the coat which dazzled her. She found herself, even after this last piece of back-aching labor, still unfinished, still out at the hitching rail and now with steel comb and dandy-brush working upon tail and mane. . . .

And then it was over—but not until after a discussion upon feeding which led to a sharp reduction in the amount which went into Mac’s hayrack and a not-so-sharp increase in his grain.

She came out of the box and bolted the door behind her and leaned heavily against it for a moment—and then found she had forgotten to fill the water bucket and gritted her teeth and opened the door again and took the bucket across the yard to the faucet and filled it and somehow car-

ried it back and managed, with a lot of slopping, to hang it on its hook.

She came out for the second time and bolted the door and once more leaned against it. She was through. She was all in.

Olivant came out of Fitzgerald's box on the other side of the yard. He was abominably quick and sure in his movements. He wasn't tired; he was horribly, damnably adequate—and she suddenly hated him for the insensibility she had blessed a long hour before; the failure to sense how she was feeling. He said, "With you in a minute," and went quickly toward the tackroom and ran up the little steps and disappeared.

She turned and began to walk toward the driveway. Her head felt as if it were stuffed with cotton—but stuffed until the softness of the packing was rammed down so tight that it was a hard, heavy, torturing lump.

She had taken only half a dozen listless steps when the tightness seemed suddenly to swell, and to spread downward to her throat, and then to burst. Tears stung her eyes and convulsive sobs tore their way out of her and she turned about and made blindly for the tackroom at a stumbling, uncertain run.

She clattered up the three steps and pushed at the door and swung it open. Through the mist of tears she could see him as a dim, tall figure—and she clutched at this figure with her hands and crowded her head against it and shook painfully to the sobbing and let the tears run unchecked.

An arm came about her. With gentle, irresistible pressure it moved her unwilling body—and she found herself sitting. But he was still beside her, sitting too—and she writhed around, so that she could clutch him again, and keep her face hidden against him.

The arm stayed around her shoulders—a steely arm which held her loosely and yet was firm—an arm which felt utterly unlike Bruce’s arm but steadily reminded her of Bruce and thereby increased the abandon of her tears. . . .

The sobs stopped treading on each other’s heels; the tears checked; the dreadful, tight, woolly feeling in her head was gone; she was herself again, and dreadfully ashamed. She moved a little, and was going to put a hand up to her eyes when she felt the smooth cold flatness of a linen handkerchief thrust between her fingers.

She snatched at it and dabbed at her eyes and kept them hidden. She tried to speak and was stopped by a treacherous, aftermathy sort of sob.

She said at last, “It’s . . . not what you think! . . . You don’t . . . know.”

He spoke for the first time—in exactly the right voice.

“You’ll feel a lot better now,” he said. “I wondered when it was coming.”

“But you don’t . . . don’t know what it’s . . . it’s about!” She was getting more control over her voice now. “You think you do—but you don’t!”

“Want to tell me?” he said.

“I . . . I have to tell you—or you’ll th-think I’m just a . . . a gutless little nitwit who can’t hold her horse and . . . and feels such a fool afterwards that she c-cries all over the place.” She had taken the handkerchief away from her eyes now: she had forced herself to look at him.

She said, “It . . . it’s all to do with my running away. . . . You see—I’m not running away, really I’m not! N-not the way you think. I’ve . . . I’ve . . . there’s something I—I’m trying to do! . . . It’s about Bruce—about my brother. . . .”

She forgot herself and her appearance. She forgot every-

thing except that here was a friend and that she had to tell this friend, who was wise and strong, about the job Bruce had been so sure she could do—the job she had been so sure she could do. She had to tell him about the dead, awful misery which had seized her now that she knew she couldn't do it.

She said, "Wh-when I was waiting to find out . . . when I was only af-afraid my hand couldn't be f-fixed, I *thought* about running away—I *wanted* to r-run away! And Bruce knew it—he m-must have known it . . . be-because he gave me an idea—a w-wonderful idea—and he th-thought I could do it—and so I thought I could do it. . . ."

She leaned back against his arm and words gushed out of her as she told him all about it—about Bruce's letter suggesting it—about how she'd almost decided to do it after she'd left the doctor's office that day—and about how she'd really made up her mind when she'd read Bruce's last letter, just before she had learned he was dead. . . .

She said, "And he had so much confidence in me! He knew I could do it—and so I knew I could do it. . . . And now, this morning, I've found out that I can't do it! . . . He knew I could—but I can't. I can't do it! If . . . if you can't even b-breeze a horse, how can you get him ready! . . . And besides, I don't *know* enough to do the work properly. . . . I'm . . . I suppose I've just been k-kidding myself all the time! I suppose I *am* running away. And all I know is that I'm just . . . just . . . just miserable!"

The tears stung in her swollen eyes again and she covered her face with her hands and blindly let her head drop forward.

The arm—just when she wanted it most—was withdrawn from her shoulders. There was a movement, and she knew that her friend wasn't sitting beside her any more. She heard his voice from above her. It said:

"You're overtired. That's all. And a bit too egoistic. You're doing all right with the horse. What you can't do, I will—and you can take some of the other work on for me. We'll also make Fowler let us have the little coon, and we'll split his wages."

She heard him moving about while he talked. Brushing the tears savagely away, she lifted her head and saw that he had gone to the curtain which cut off one corner of the little room and was searching for something behind it. She was sitting upon the edge of the bed, on the red-and-white-checked blanket she had seen when she had peered through the window that first night which seemed such a very long time ago.

He drew the curtain back and came toward her and dropped a clean towel onto her knees.

"What you need," he said, "is cold water." He was looking directly at her and there was a smile in his eyes and she felt suddenly better—but all at once painfully conscious of what her face must look like.

He pointed to a door in the wall at the other end of the room. "In there," he said. "And mind the step."

She stood up: it seemed as if a load had been lifted from her. Her head was clear and sane again. She went to the door he had pointed out and opened it and took a steep step down and closed it behind her.

She was back in five minutes. He had been right again: cold water had worked wonders—and mercifully she had found both lipstick and comb in her pockets.

He looked at her. "What did I tell you?" he said—and smiled.

It wasn't like any of the smiles she had seen him use before: it was warm and friendly and unpointed.

She said, "But my eyes look terrible!" and saw that he had opened the door and was waiting for her. A little un-

certainly, she went out and down the steps, putting up a hand to shade her face from the glare.

He led the way out of the yard and turned toward the house and the Inn.

"Where're we going?" she said.

He looked at her. "To get a drink. Maybe two drinks."

She thought of her eyes and wondered whether they would still show that she'd been crying—but his hand slid into the crook of her elbow and bore her on.

"That's all right," he said. "It's dark in the bar in the daytime. Come on, now."

She went on—and they sat at a table in the farthest corner and looked at Lenardos' flower arrangements and didn't talk much until after the first drink. But when the second came and the waiter had gone she said suddenly:

"I haven't said thank you, have I? . . . Thank you."

He didn't say anything, but his eyes smiled at her again, and he picked up his glass and drank.

She said, "When will you arrange about Sherry working for us?" She wanted to talk—about anything rather than nothing, but preferably—far preferably—about what they were going to do; what the Stable was going to do.

"Soon as I see Fowler," he said.

She smiled at him over the rim of her glass. "Then we'll be a Stable, won't we?" She felt sure and almost serene, with all doubts about McTavish gone and only excitement left.

"How do we start?" she said. "I mean—what do we do?"

He set down the glass. "Work," he said. "Work like hell."

## **BOOK TWO**





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## Chapter Eight

THE big car purred down the grades and took the sharply angled turns as if it were on rails. It was a joy to drive, and when Mr. Fowler said proudly, "Drives nice, huh?" Janet smiled at him and nodded emphatically.

She was glad she was driving. If she hadn't been—if she'd been sitting idly as a passenger, the sick excitement inside her would have been much more difficult to bear. She looked at the clock on the dashboard for the third time since they'd started, although the Inn was barely two miles behind them.

She said, "I suppose there's plenty of time?" and didn't mind when the old man laughed at her.

"And it's not even your own horse that's runnin'!" he said.

She smiled at him. "It's the same Stable, though. And that means nearly as much."

He chuckled—but he didn't say any more and they drove on for several miles in silence. She couldn't keep her eyes from straying to the clock, although she knew the race wasn't until three-forty-five and they had three hours and more for the seventy-minute drive. It seemed so much further to the San Pietro highway than she had remembered: the narrow, winding, down-sloping road seemed to be endless, with the curve ahead always looking like the last one and never turning out to be.

She said, "It isn't as if this was just another race," and didn't remember that there had been a long interval since either of them had spoken. "D'you realize this is the first time Fitzgerald's even seen a course? Or a racing-fence either, if it comes to that."

"Huh?" The old man turned his head toward her sharply. "Thought you and Rich was sayin' the jumps Craddock built was fine."

"Oh, they are! He did a swell job. But it isn't quite the same thing, you know." She slowed down for another sharp curve in the road. "Home schooling's never like the real article, is it?"

"No, I guess it's not," said the old man with unexpected gravity.

She rounded the curve—and found that here was indeed the last one, just when she had least expected it. The highway ran across their path, broad and grey-white. It was a solid river of concrete—and across the mouth of their narrow tributary, along the smooth surface of the river, flashed cars and trucks and busses of every size and age and shape. She was staggered by the number and speed of them: here was a rural length of highway, and it seemed as busy as Broadway. She stopped the car, although it was a right-hand turn she had to make and she could have edged around it.

She was amazed by a sudden realization, and said, "I've been away," without knowing that she'd spoken until she heard the echo of the words. She looked at the old man quickly and hurried on as if she'd been speaking to him all the time. She said:

"I didn't realize—but it's over four weeks since I even saw a main road. It's . . . kind of startling."

"We're way out of the world up there." He looked at

her with a sudden grin. "Or maybe in it. Remember what Rich was sayin', that first time we all had dinner? 'In the world where we all know what we're at?' . . . somethin' like that?"

She nodded without speaking. She slipped into low gear and nosed around the corner and was in the stream. It didn't seem so thick when she was a part of it—and presently she was sending the big car along at an easy sixty-five.

The old man stared out of the window at the traffic, turning his head this way and that: he seemed fascinated by what he was seeing.

He said, "Seems like they know what they're doin' in this world too," and pointed to a long line of open trucks they were passing. "Look at that!"

She looked—and saw load after load of strangely disembodied shapes which were the wings and fuselages of airplanes.

"And *that!*" He pointed, and she saw, on the other side of the broad road, in the stream of vehicles moving against them, a long rank of Army trucks, each one looking, with its arching canvas top, like a Martian's idea of a covered wagon.

They drove on in silence. She was conscious of a strange, uncomfortable feeling which persisted even when she tried to lose it by concentrating her thoughts upon Fitzgerald and Fitzgerald's owner. It wouldn't go: it didn't drown the excitement, but it seemed somehow to become mixed up with it and take a lot of the pleasure away, leaving more of the sick and empty feeling. It puzzled her—and the more she tried to ignore it, the worse it grew.

The traffic thickened as they neared the outskirts of San Pietro. Much of it was ordinary cars—but there were still many trucks—a tremendous percentage of trucks. They car-

ried lumber, and steel, and shrouded bulky shapes. They were grim, determined trucks, going this way and that about businesses which, she thought, even a stranger from another world could see was the same business. They moved around in the sunlight which blazed down from a vivid blue sky—but the jarring, rattling noises they made seemed sharp and thin against the deep, humming sounds which came from the sky itself.

The old man was craning out of the open window at his side. "Never saw so many planes in my life!" he said—and then forgot them as they came over the last rise and took the curve to the right and saw the whole of Pietro Bay spread out before them.

The water was a deeper blue than the blue above, and it was dotted with the lean, dark shapes of battleships. The dots were in orderly clumps, and the clumps themselves were arranged with a kind of designed irregularity which was somehow impressive and frightening.

The old man whistled in surprise. "That's a lot of ships! A lot of 'em!"

They drove down the wide waterfront road, past the factories and airdromes and barracks. They had to slow down to a sober thirty-five because the crowd of vehicles was increasing all the time. It was very hot. They were forced to the inside line and had to slacken speed still more, crawling along beside the sidewalk.

"And a lot of uniforms, too!" said Mr. Fowler, staring at the streams of walkers.

Janet said, "Yes, aren't there?" and looked at them with half an eye as she drove along—sailors in white; sailors in blue; impeccable Marines; round-hatted, drill-clad selectees; two tin-helmeted sentries at a wide iron gate; an

important-looking person covered in gold braid; swarms of mechanics in overseas caps and grease-stained overalls.

"Yes," she said. "It's amazing, isn't it?" And then, after a moment, "Of course they know what they're doing!"

She had a fleeting impression that the old man looked at her sharply, but she had to give her whole attention to driving as they neared a main cross-road and were halted by a red light and a policeman.

"Left here—if you can make it," Mr. Fowler said. "If you don't mind, there's a store I want to stop by. It's on our road."

She turned left when they could move again, and they drove through the heart of the sprawling city and she followed directions and didn't look any more at the traffic or the sidewalks. The uncomfortable feeling still persisted. It was stronger. It had almost driven away the excitement. It insisted upon being analyzed and turned out to be a sensation of something like shame; a sensation inextricably mixed up with memories of Bruce.

"Whoa!" said Mr. Fowler suddenly. "Right here—the bookstore. We can edge in behind that truck."

There was just room, and she did a quick, neat job of parking. She had hardly come to a standstill before the old man had opened the door and hopped out onto the sidewalk. She saw him disappear into the doorway of the store. He was moving quickly and surely today; his back looked almost young. She thought: *he's excited too, bless him!* and felt much better. The uncomfortable feeling faded, and her own excitement returned in full flood. She looked at the clock and saw with surprise that it was only twenty past one.

She twisted the driving mirror and looked at herself critically and liked as much as she could see; the small,

rust-colored hat hadn't slipped askew, her nose wasn't shiny, her tan made her eyes seem very bright. If the grey suit wasn't too much wrinkled when she left the car, she'd do very nicely.

She was fumbling in her purse to make sure she had brought her lipstick, compact and, most important, her owner-trainer pass, when the car door opened and Mr. Fowler was settling himself beside her again. He carried a package which was almost certainly a book—and was holding it out to her.

"For me?" she said. She found that she was oddly, disproportionately pleased.

"Sure," he said. "You'd have got it before—but they had some trouble gettin' it. Out of print or somethin', they told me."

"A present?" she said.

He grinned at her like an urchin. "Well, I'm not goin' to put it on your bill."

"You're much too nice to me," she said. "In fact, you're spoiling me." She felt the package, toying with her curiosity before she opened it. She couldn't imagine what book it could be. She wanted to play; to leave it unopened until she'd had a hundred guesses.

"What d'you mean, I'm spoilin' you?"

"Well, you are!" She smiled at him. "Look how you fixed the house up for me! Look at the ridiculous rent I pay for that and stabling! Look at the lovely dinners of yours I'm always eating!"

He said, "Boloney!" with great dignity. "Suppose you tear the paper off that and take a peek and let's be on our way!"

She laughed—and began to unwrap the package reluctantly, still wishing she could play with guesses.

He watched her anxiously. "There's no—what do they call it?—that extra cover? . . ."

"I hate jackets anyway," she said. The wrapping was off now and the book itself was in her hands. Its back was uppermost. It was a longish, tallish book bound in sober, dark-green cloth—and she suddenly realized that it must of course be something horsey. She hoped she hadn't read it and wouldn't have to pretend it was new to her.

She turned it over—and read, *Man's Place In The Pattern*, and then the author's name, *Richard Olivant*.

"Oh," she said—and then "Oh," again. She opened it and found the title-page and read the title once more, and then the author's name again, with the string of letters after it, and then, upon the opposite leaf, 'Also by Richard Olivant—*The Wheel And The Early Crafts; Fraser Versus Briffault—A Critical Study; and From Ur To Yucatan.*'

She looked for a date and found one four years old, and then began to turn over the pages.

"Thought you ought to know about your stable side-kick." The old man was giving the most satisfied of his chuckles. "Not fair to keep you in the dark."

She looked at him and kept the book open in her hands.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you very much. . . . Have you read it?"

"All four of 'em." He was still chuckling. "Grand books. Can't understand a word of 'em. Great fellow, Rich!"

She put the book carefully into the glove-compartment and started the engine.

"Take the first right and then go left." He looked at his watch and compared it with the clock. "We ought to catch the second race."

She made the turn and found herself in a much less busy street and stepped on the accelerator.

She said, "How did you and he meet?" and then worried for a moment in case this might have sounded rude.

There was no chuckle this time, but a round and loud and definite laugh.

"That's a long story," he said. "And maybe you'll never get to hear it. . . . Take the second left."

She obeyed directions—and was once more in a tangle of traffic. But now there were no trucks and the whole stream was moving in the same direction. She edged into the tide and crept along at thirty miles an hour, giving up all attempts to pull out and pass after two or three tries which failed miserably.

"All roads lead to Ventana," said the old man unexpectedly. "Guess they're all like us—figured they'd miss the rush."

There was a jam ahead of them and she had to stop the car. She said, suddenly:

"He's a weird person, isn't he? Anthropology and steeple-chasing's such an awfully unlikely mixture."

"Takes a lotta knowin' Rich does." The tone was unusually solemn. "Very seclusive sort of fellow."

There was a suggestion of finality in the voice, but Janet kept on. She didn't want to stop. The subject was of paramount interest—and she was feeling adventurous and very, very curious.

She said, "I shouldn't think he makes friends easily, does he?" and was horrified by a desire to giggle which was difficult to suppress. She wanted to see how the question was taken, but couldn't because the traffic ahead moved on and she was kept busy with driving.

"Couldn't say," said Mr. Fowler. "Sort of difficult fellow to get pals with. All the better for that."

She said, "Yes. Very!" and stopped herself from saying



any more. She'd nearly blurted out something about wondering where he counted acquaintanceship to stop and friendship to begin. It was becoming terribly important to her to attain that status where what had been poison would turn into adventure: she was going to achieve it soon or burst.

She wanted to giggle again—and then was astonished by a sudden and reasonless change of mood. She wanted to cry. She was in love—and she might as well be in limbo.

As they neared the border, the traffic became so dense that they crawled for the last mile on the United States side. The wide main street of the village—Janet could never find anyone who knew the place's name—had been turned into a one-way passage and there were four lines moving slowly down it toward the broad, clear space where the iron barrier stretched across the road between the two Customs Houses. Here, the four lines were compressed into two, one for each of the pair of Mexican entrances. They were long, long lines, and they moved very slowly through the gates, each car having to stop and answer the routine questioning of the Mexican sentry before it passed on.

They had to creep up to the barrier in low gear, by fits and starts. The driving was hot and nervous work, but their turn came at last, and she stopped the car in the gateway while a little Mexican, round-faced and sweating in his khaki, looked in at the window and said, "Nassion-ahlitee?"

"American," she said, with Mr. Fowler only half a beat behind her. It occurred to her, for the first time in her life, that it was a grand word to say—especially in answer to this particular question.

The round face in the window said, "Ké-o!" and smiled at its own perpetual joke and waved them on.

She drove cautiously ahead to join the tail of the long caravan which was bumping over the rutted, dusty road toward the narrow bridge across the arroyo.

Mr. Fowler said, "Never changes, this dump doesn't." He was looking out of the window again, darting glances this way and that, but after a moment he sat back in the seat and looked at her. "Seems kind of funny to me: they put some iron across the road—and you drive under it—an' bang! you're in a . . . in a . . ." He was searching for words. "Well, it's all different. The road ain't paved, the buildin's ain't the same sort of buildin's, the kids look lots dirtier—and plenty happier, if you ask me—an' the town's called 'Uncle Jimmy' if you translate it. . . . And every-thing's changed so darn quick, if you get what I mean."

The pace of the caravan was steady now, and Janet could turn and look at him.

"I know *exactly*!" she said. "Exactly! When I first came here, I remember thinking that as soon as you drove through the barrier, even the air felt different."

He looked at her with solemn eyes. "That's right," he said. "That's *right*!"

They were in the middle of the narrow bridge now, just coming over the hump, and the township of Tio Jaimo lay spread out awkwardly to their left. The pace was very slow, and the cars ahead were throwing up a misty, hanging cloud of red-brown dust. There was a little thump on the running board, and a dirty Botticelli cherub's face thrust itself through the window on the passenger's side, bringing with it a broad taint of garlic.

"Cigarritos . . ." it said. "Muy baratos. . . . Veinte . . ." and then, with a tremendous effort, "On-lee one dy-eem for teeventy!"

The old man took a quarter from his pocket. "Keep the cigarettes," he said. "An' buy a cake of soap." He thrust the coin into the small grimy hand which reached for it.

"Gracias!" piped the cherub. "Gracias, Señor! . . ." He smiled angelically. "Thanks a lot, Mister," he said—and dropped off the running board to select another victim.

"Never changes," said Mr. Fowler. "You don't come around this way for ten years, and it's still the way it was. Even the kids are the same."

Janet didn't answer. She was busy with memories. She followed the caravan carefully off the bridge—and then deserted it for the short cut she remembered, turning sharply left onto a bumpy narrow lane between two rows of hovels.

She remembered every one of the pits and hillocks in the road. She remembered the sinister and incredibly dirty façade of the drooping, two-story shack which announced itself, in peeling letters two feet high, as HOTEL CONTINENTALE. She remembered the high white curving wall behind the bull-ring, and the little one-pump station on the corner where they once had bought some gas. She remembered the turning which would bring them back to the main road again, three hundred cars further up the line.

And she remembered the trees which lined the main road here; fluffy trees of bright, bright green. She remembered so many things.

She fought her way back into the line—and when she was in it turned half around in her seat and took one hand from the wheel and laid it on the old man's arm.

She said, "Oh, I do wish you could have known my brother!"

The stands were packed and the club house was filled to overflowing. But somehow Mr. Fowler got a table for

them—right in the middle of the third terrace, exactly opposite the finish-line. She never knew how he did it: it just seemed to happen—there was no table, there was a table.

The second race was running when they arrived and they had lunch at once and the old man said it was very good but Janet couldn't taste it. She looked over the course all the time: she saw that the turf of the infield was much greener and smoother than she remembered, but she also saw that the jumps had been changed, much for the worse from a horseman's point of view. There were still seven of them, and they were in the same positions—but they were bigger and stiffer. The water, which was right in front of where they sat, had been lengthened, but the fence itself was still much too high for a water take-off. The jump opposite the water, on the far side, was now a Liverpool—and a big and awkward Liverpool. A white baulk of timber, let into the ground, marked the take-off, and between it and the fence a seven-foot ditch yawned blackly; it wouldn't have been so bad, she thought, if only they'd made the fence itself a little lower and not quite so thick—but as it was, it seemed a really terrifying test for a green horse. She stopped herself from thinking about it and considered the five other jumps: they were all plain brush, but it was very stiff and solid brush, and there was no proper take-off, and each fence was white timber up to nearly four feet of its total height of something like five.

She said, "Golly! I suppose the crowd likes spills," and this led to a lot of questions from Mr. Fowler who'd never seen a 'chase except one Maryland Hunt Cup and had to be told the difference between brush and timber racing; the reasons why high-rating steeplechase jockeys were so often so-called amateur riders; how 'chasing was much more

proof of the real worth of a thoroughbred than squirrel-cage dashing around a track; how flat-racing, always begun too early in a horse's life, definitely wore out heart and muscle and endurance so quickly that most people had come to think a racehorse was old at eight and were always astonished or disbelieving when told that the average age for winners of the greatest test of them all—the English Grand National—was eleven years; how Bruce had always insisted that in a steeplechaser you had a horse who was proving the real worth of his species because, when the world ran out of gasoline, he could take you, fast *and* over obstacles, from place to place; how, after you had once been interested in 'chasing, no flat race could ever really move you; how 'chasing nowadays had to fight for its place in racing because the moneyed business interests were against it on the grounds—which they never dared to state openly—that it cut disastrously into their "take" because, in the first place, a jumping race took longer and therefore cut down the number of events they could run off in one day, and in the second place because, as it was so much more chancey, the steady bettors either wouldn't wager at all or cut down their bets; how steeplechasing was more difficult in one way to keep clean than flat racing, because clever jockeys could always sell a race by "taking a dive"—but how, on the other hand, it was easier to keep it straight because "fixing" of a chosen winner becomes much more difficult when the horse may fall at any fence. . . .

She was stopped in the middle of a sentence by a bell which rang loudly, with a jangling, enveloping sound which seemed to come from every direction at once; the bell which meant that the betting windows were open for the third race.

"Poor man!" she said. "I must've been talking your head off. Why didn't you stop me?"

He said, seriously, "Because it was interestin'. Always did like to get the real dope—on anything."

She opened her race card for the first time. Suppressing a childish desire to look first for the steeplechase entries, she turned to the third race.

"Going to bet?" she said.

He nodded. He was looking at his own card. He had taken a pencil from his pocket and was poring over the long list of some fourteen runners. He said:

"Thousand-dollar claimer . . . h'mm . . . seven furlongs. . . . Three-year-olds and up . . . h'mm. . . ." He looked at her and grinned. "In the old days, now, I'd have known somethin'." He pored over the card again, and she smiled at the top of his head and then once more looked out over the brown track at the 'chase course in the green infield. She found herself concentrating upon the water, with its too-high fence, and on the grim, alarming Liverpool. After all, Fitzgerald was as green as the grass itself. . . . After all, he'd never seen anything but schooling fences—and although one of these had a little three-foot ditch in front of it, and another a seven-foot "water" made of corrugated tin on its far side, they were, neither of them, anything like the grim, looming realities she was looking at. . . .

She was worried. She didn't want to be worried—it made the sick part of her excitement too noticeable. She forced her eyes away from the infield, and away from the track. She made them look around her at the other people who crowded the club-house terraces. She tried to look at the people, but only succeeded in seeing the panorama—white buildings and red roofs and clay-brown track; flowers and

shade and sunlight; blue, blue sky and green, green grass; gay striped awnings and gay bright dresses; the massed colorings of banks of flowers; grey stone steps and white wood rails; a Mexican firmament arching over an American crowd.

The third race was over, and Mr. Fowler's pockets were stuffed with winnings from the preposterous long-shot he had hit on the nose. He kept chuckling to himself as they pushed their way through the crowd and once or twice he said something to her. She didn't answer; she just smiled at him and resisted the temptation to go faster. The blaring of the loudspeakers was ringing disjointedly in her ears, and she knew the steeplechase horses were on their way to the roofed-in saddling-barn which they insisted upon calling the paddock. The people would not get themselves out of her way, and she kept going through barriers and showing her pass and then having to wait while Mr. Fowler collected Pass-Out checks.

The iron voice was talking about the steeplechasers. It was saying: ". . . proud to have kept up the interest in this thrilling branch of the sport." They were nearing the paddock now, and the cluster of address-system trumpets on top of the open-sided, red-roofed building was assailing their ears insistently, its words being sometimes unaccountably replaced by metallic grunts and cacklings.

"Arkle cronk!" it bellowed. "Yak-ak-ak the Paloma, a two-and-a-half mile race over sixteen fences. There are yonk-onk starters—and they are on their way to the paddock now, Ladies and Gentlemen. Within a few minutes you will ak-ak yonkle . . ."

"There's another thing that don't change around here." Mr. Fowler was beside her again. "They must do it on purpose—or maybe it's Nazi interference these days." He

was pleased with this—and was still laughing when Janet suddenly caught him by the arm.

“Look!” she said. “Look!”

They were almost at the railed-off strip which led to the entrance of the paddock, and through the thinning ranks of people could see the cooler-shrouded horses being led along it.

She plunged forward, keeping her grip upon the old man’s arm and dragging him with her until they stood at the rail itself, just in time to see Fitzgerald, nearly the last in the line. He was behaving more sedately than the horses in front of him, but he was walking as if the earth were too hot—or too contaminating—for his feet to rest upon it for more than the merest fraction of time. Beside him, one hand on the bit and the other, with the slack of halter-shank neatly looped in its grip, stiffly at his side, marched the small, stocky figure of Sherry, very smart in new white overalls which accented the copper of his face and hands and the crisp blue-blackness of his hair.

But Janet had eyes only for the stallion. She said, “Oh, look at him! Isn’t he lovely?” although in actuality she could see very little of the loveliness. Only his white-shielded, aristocratic head and his white-bandaged, earth-spurning legs escaped the voluminousness of the bright checkered blanket—but in her mind she could see all of him, the ripple of the flowing curving muscles beneath the jet satin coat, the little delicate meshwork of veins upon his neck and shoulders, the high tremendous quarters and the massive graceful arching of the crest.

“Isn’t he *beautiful*!” she said—and found there was a lump in her throat which ached.

“Best-lookin’ blanket in the bunch.” The old man was laughing at her. “Want to see him saddled?”



She didn't answer, but started off toward the public entrance to the paddock, weaving and threading her way through the milling bystanders. She forgot all about Mr. Fowler until, by dint of pushing, pleading and wriggling, she found herself beneath the paddock-roof and right against the wire-mesh fence which separated onlookers from the open-faced saddling-stalls. And she was almost directly opposite stall Number Seven.

"You're either lucky or stubborn," came Mr. Fowler's voice from behind her, and she glanced around and up at him with a sudden feeling of guilt which was dispelled at once by his smile.

She looked back again at stall Seven. The blanket was off Fitzgerald now and Sherry stood at his head and a lean, wide-shouldered figure, strangely graceful in racing boots and white breeches and red-and-white checkered silks, was cinching the sheepskin-protected girths of the smallest 'chasing saddle she had ever seen. A red-and-white cap, strained over its light leather crash helmet, hung upon one of the posts of the stall, and the back of the jockey's dark head was turned toward her. It affected her curiously: she felt excited still, but, because he was so intent upon what he was doing, and because he wasn't looking at her, she felt all at once lonely and neglected—a left-out sort of feeling.

"Sort of understaffed, ain't they?" Mr. Fowler said. "Why don't they get some help, like the others?" He jerked his head toward stalls Four and Five and Six, where a small crowd of stable-boys and men with hats and helpers in overalls fussed about each horse.

She said, "Want to keep him quiet, probably," and went on looking at Fitzgerald. "This is his first time, you know."

The saddling was finished now, and Olivant was short-

ening the girth-strap of the running martingale. The stallion stood still. He was cool and unmoved by his surroundings but very curious about them, holding his head high and turning it this way and that as he took in everything around him.

"There's a swell-looking horse!" said a youth on Janet's right.

He was answered by the girl beyond him. "Just pretty!" She sniffed. "Give me somep'n real racy—like Number Five there. Lookit him now! Lookit him kick!" She rustled the pages of her race-card. "What's his name?"

"Durya," the boy said carefully, looking at his own card. "And he's a she—it says here."

From above them, on the roof, came a sudden burst of clarity from the cluster of trumpets. "It is interesting to note, ladies and gentlemen, that the runners in today's steeplechase include several entries for the Twenty-Thousand-Dollar Ventana Gran Premio to be run next month. First and foremost is Durya. . . ."

The iron voice choked and began to cackle again; then suddenly ceased altogether. Janet still stared at stall Number Seven. She was willing Olivant to turn and see her. But he didn't. The martingale fixed, he said something to Sherry and then squatted to examine the bandage on the near fore.

"Looks sorta quiet," came Mr. Fowler's voice in her ear. "Not too quiet, is he?" He sounded faintly worried.

She turned to look at him, shaking her head. "It's his first time," she said. "And when they're green, they take all this—" she made a little, inclusive gesture with her hand—"all sorts of different ways. Fitz happens to be quiet. But wait till he's had three or four races, and knows what

it all means!" She wished she were as convinced as her voice was sounding.

The old man smiled down at her. He looked as if he were going to say something, but a woman beside him chose this moment to pluck at his sleeve.

"'Scuse me," she said. "But why're these jockeys so big?" She was immensely fat, and wheezed in an odd, happy manner as she spoke. "Or maybe I'm crazy! But I'm not, though." She pointed. "Look at that one—and then this one right here in red and white!"

Mr. Fowler cleared his throat. "This next race is a steeplechase, you see. A jumpin' race." He cleared his throat again, and Janet felt his hand nudging at her elbow. But she wouldn't help. She suppressed a smile and pretended she hadn't noticed the nudge.

"Sure!" said the wheeze. "But you'd reckon that'd make 'em want littler men yet. Now wouldn't you?"

"It's a matter of strength," said Mr. Fowler desperately. "You got to be stronger, see, to help the horses over jumps."

Bells rang faintly in the distance, and the iron voice erupted again. "The windows are open, ladies and gentlemen. You can place your bets now."

"Strength, huh?" said the wheeze. "Maybe I see what you mean. Thanks a thousand!"

From the corner of her eye, Janet saw the fat form go, throwing a sort of wake of bystanders to each side of its bows. She turned her head and looked up at the old man and said, "Not bad, Mr. Fowler. Not bad at all!"

He said, "I was just wonderin' myself when she asked me. Good guess, huh?" He peered at his card. "They got Rich down for one-forty. You can't tell me he can make that!"

"Ssh!" said Janet. "They'll let you ride overweight here—but they don't like to shout about it. And he has starved himself down under fifty."

"H'mm!" The old man sounded worried again. "Seems like a lot of extra weight. On a green horse, too!"

"There's plenty to balance it." She spoke absently: she was looking at the stall again—and still he hadn't turned his head. He was kneeling now, re-rolling the near-fore bandage. She glanced toward the other stalls and saw that most of the horses were ready and waiting. A plump, grey-hatted steward was bustling along, checking them off.

She said, "You see, Mr. Fowler, weight doesn't count so much, intrinsically, as it does in flat-racing. Everything else being equal, it would, of course. But then everything else isn't equal."

He grinned at her. "You're gettin' as bad as Rich. Can't understand a word."

She had to laugh. She said, "There's the very vital question of horsemanship, to begin with," and then broke off as she saw the fat steward approaching. "I'll tell you another time. They'll be going in a minute."

She fixed her eyes on the back of the dark head again—and then had it cut from her sight by the bulk of the steward as he stopped and studied the sheet of paper he carried.

"All ready here?" he said—and then, "Hey, you, jock! Whatcha doin' with that bandage?" His voice was even fatter and fussier than his walk. "Where's y'r trainer? Where's y'r boys? Where's y'r owner?" He pushed the new grey Stetson to the back of his head and stood with arms akimbo and stared down at the red-and-white-checkered back.

Olivant finished the last fastening of the bandage and stood up and turned leisurely around.

"I'm all of 'em," he said, and then waved a hand at Sherry. "And this is my secretary." Janet saw that he was pale beneath his tan; pale with the same sort of pallor Bruce had always shown before a race, when he was suffering from what he called *mal-de-paddock*.

Olivant said, "Name's Olivant. Look at your card," and turned away and took the red-and-white cap from where it hung and put it on, ramming the leather of the skull-cap tightly down onto his head and then beginning to tie the strings of the covering silk.

The back of the steward's fat neck was very red—and the redness darkened as there came a tittering from the on-lookers. He stared at the paper in his hand and made several dabs at it with his pencil.

"You ready?" he said in a choked voice and turned away.

But he didn't move on at once, even after Olivant had nodded: he was making some marks upon the paper—and Janet suddenly saw that the stallion's head was turned toward him. There was a white, naughty gleam in the equine eye—and the black neck was slowly thrust forward until the muzzle was almost touching the back of the pristine hat.

Janet knew what was going to happen. She stretched a hand out behind her and clutched at Mr. Fowler's arm.

"Oh, watch!" she whispered. "Watch!"

It happened. The velvet lips rolled back from the gleaming teeth. The teeth opened; then closed—very, very gently—upon the extreme edge of the wide, grey brim. The black head was jerked up, quickly, as high as it would go—and it stayed there, the hat dangling ridiculous from its mouth

while the eyes, half-closed, glittered coyly wicked glances down the jet muzzle.

It would have been funny anyway, even if the victim hadn't been the fussy, self-important pomposity he was; even if he'd had a thatch of hair and not the pinkly naked, egg-shaped dome upon which he now clapped a startled hand.

He whirled about, glaring furiously around him, but not upward.

He said, "Who the *hell* . . ." and the tittering of the onlookers became a roar of laughter.

Sherry, staring upward, put a hand to his mouth and explosive, uncertain noises came from behind the repressing fingers. The lead rope was still in his hand but hanging loosely. He didn't move: he seemed paralysed.

Olivant finished tying the strings of his cap. He was pale still, but a smile was tugging at one corner of his mouth. He took a pace toward Fitzgerald and held up his hand just as the steward, still rubbing at his shining pate, looked up and saw. It seemed as if he were going to jump at the horse, but there was a red-and-white shoulder in his way and he stood fuming and impotent.

Janet found her lips moving. They were shaping the words, "*Come on, Fagin. Drop it!*" and she was surprised by them.

Olivant said, "*Come on, Fagin. Drop it!*" and held his hand where it was until the black head was reluctantly lowered and the white teeth came open and the hat was in the waiting fingers.

The steward snatched at it and clapped it onto his head. He glared at Sherry balefully and turned on his heel and went quickly away.

The crowd still laughed, and behind her Janet could

hear the chortling of Mr. Fowler. But she didn't laugh any more: she was staring at Olivant. He seemed to be looking almost directly at her—but he hadn't seen her.

"Hey, Rich!" Mr. Fowler was shouting at him now. "Good luck, Rich!"

He looked in the direction of the shout and lifted his hand in a little gesture of recognition and salute—but there was no recognition in his eyes.

The crowd in the paddock was melting fast, and down the line of stalls some jockeys were already mounted and others were being legged up, and when she turned her head she could see a red-coated, black-capped, mounted figure waiting at the entrance to lead the parade to the start.

She looked back at Number Seven and saw Sherry with his hands to Olivant's raised left boot, and saw the lithe figure, a flash of red and white, go up easily and lightly, like a boy, and thrust its feet home into the irons and then gather up the rubber-covered racing-rein.

He hadn't seen her, and he wouldn't see her. She turned her back to the wire fence and caught Mr. Fowler by the arm and said, "We'd better hurry back and bet," and marched him off without a backward glance.

They were lucky, and made record time back to the clubhouse and the mutuel windows in the hall next the bar and even were in time to be first at an extra window at the end. She picked up her tickets and went out to the terraces again and found their table and sat down and stared at the track and the infield. The old, freezing excitement was spreading its cold fingers all over her. It was as bad as it used to be when Bruce was riding. It was worse.

The line of 'chase horses, headed by the red-coated Clerk of the Course on his chunky grey, was passing through the opening into the infield; the opening which had been

made, near the judge's tower, by swinging back a section of the inside rail of the track. She saw it first as a jumbled pattern of variegated color; then forced her eyes to focus and broke it up into its eleven units of man and horse and picked out, halfway along the line, the ebony coat of Fitzgerald and the checker-board silks of his rider. In front of the stallion a gaunt powerful bay was cutting up, and behind him Number Eight was plunging and switching sideways and threatening every moment to crash into his jet quarters—but Fitzgerald walked slow and straight and unmoved by all the excitement around him. He kept turning his head to look at everything—the judge's tower, the jumps, the flags of the 'chase course, even the brown track and the crowded bleachers beyond it.

"What's he doin'?" said Mr. Fowler, and sank into the chair beside her. "Countin' the customers?"

Janet started: she'd forgotten all about him. She was about to apologize when she saw the thick pile of blue tickets he had set down on the table. They were book-makers' tickets and not from the tote, so their color didn't give away their price. But there were a great many of them.

"You're taking an awful chance, aren't you?" She touched the pile of pasteboard with her finger. "Unless you've been hedging," she said.

"No, *ma'am!*" He shook his head decisively. "The bundle's on the black boy. Square on his nose, too." He picked her race-glasses from the table with a muttered word of excuse and set them to his eyes and found their focus right for him and leveled them on the tote-board at the edge of the track.

"Didn't do much through the machines," he said. "Didn't want to bring the price down. . . . Where is that durn Seven anyways? . . . Went around among the boys.



. . . Ah, there she is! Zowie! He's around forty still!" He set the glasses back on the table.

The horses were all in a bunch near the start now, and Janet forced her gaze away from them and looked at her companion.

She said, "What price did you get? From the bookies, I mean?" She was forcing talk: a nagging thread of worry had been making itself felt through her excitement, and she didn't want to think.

He grinned. "Averaged around thirty-five, I guess. . . . Can I use the glasses again?"

"Use them all the time if you like," she said. "I don't think I'll need them here." She switched her gaze to the infield again. They were straightening the horses out now. Most of them were standing in a rough line near the first starter, but two or three, their jockeys stealing warm-ups, were galloping this way and that. The fences looked awfully big.

The old man had the glasses at his eyes. He said, "That Fitz is standing there like there wasn't anything happenin'." He didn't take the glasses down as he spoke. "Seems nice and quiet."

"He's too damn quiet!" said Janet suddenly.

Mr. Fowler stared at her. She stared back, almost defiantly, but she was glad when there was a movement in the gangway behind her and she felt someone trying to push past and was able to look around while she murmured apologies and hitched her chair nearer to the table.

But the old man still looked at her. "What's wrong?" he said. "C'mon now—spill it."

She said, "Oh . . . nothing!" and then, in a sudden rush of words, "Everything! I don't like it. I don't like it! I think the horse is too green and the course is too tough.

And I think, definitely, that no one should go on steeplechase riding after thirty—however good they may be! I know this sort of racehorse—and I know the green ones always take the first race in a different way. But they shouldn't take it *that* way—standing as quiet as a . . . as a goat—star-gazing all over the place—clowning in the paddock as if they were at home—walking out to the start like donkeys—looking as beautiful as Satan but no hotter than . . . than a Snow-Queen!" She heard her voice rising and cut the next words off and tried to laugh. "I'm sorry," she said. "I suppose I'm nervous or something."

The iron voice blared startlingly from all around them. "They are being lined up for the start, ladies and gentlemen. This is your last chance to lay your bets. The bell will close the wagering on this race at any moment. This is the Paloma Steeplechase, ladies and gentlecrank—the yunk event of the arkarkark. . . ."

"Don't get yourself all steamed up, now," said Mr. Fowler. "Say he don't make it—so what? Rich must've lost plenty races before this. And I guess he knows how to keep out of trouble too. Calm down, honey!"

She said, desperately, "You don't understand! You don't understand at all! It doesn't matter whether he wins or not. That's not the question!" She felt that everything was going too fast—her thoughts, and the old man's talk, and the bawling of the loudspeakers, and the mutterings of the crowd, and the thumping of her heart.

"The positively last chance to wank your money! . . . Oh-oh, there goes the bell! . . ."

"What d'you mean, it don't matter if he wins or not?"

"I mean the question is—is he a racehorse? Has he got heart? Does he *want* to beat other horses? Don't you understand, Mr. Fowler?"

"The start of a steeplechase, linkinks and gentlemen, is controlled by two starters. The honkses walk up to the first starter, and if they are in line, he drops his flag . . ."

"You mean Rich don't know yet whether that black sonova bee's got the stuff?"

"Exactly. And I'm terrified. I . . . I . . . I don't think he has. He's not behaving as if . . . I've a dreadful, horrible feeling he might be what they call a Morning Glory. I . . ."

". . . so you see, ladies and gentlemen, if they're in line when they pass the second starter, he drops his flag and they're off . . ."

"You think Rich's made a mistake, huh? You don't go for all that stuff about the 'greatest steeplechase horse in history'?"

"They're lining up, ladies and gentlemen! They're lining up. Any minute now and they'll be on their way—and no false starts, we hope. . . ."

"I . . . I'm frightened, Mr. Fowler—terribly frightened! I don't know! . . . I don't like the way Fitz is behaving. . . . Oh, if it was any other horse, at any other time, I wouldn't give a damn! But this is all so important! For Richard, I mean: what's going to happen if he finds . . ."

"There they go-ooo! . . . Off to a perfect start. . . ."

Mr. Fowler whipped the glasses to his eyes. Janet gripped the edge of the table and stared toward the far end of the infield. Above her head the loudspeaker was raucous with words and sounds which she did not even hear, and all around her the crowd buzzed and murmured and shouted. For a moment which seemed an age the field and the horses and the course were all fuzzed up together in her sight like a kaleidoscope blurred by faulty focussing—and then, with a horrible suddenness, became extraordinarily

clear. A bunch of horses was tearing into the first fence—the fence which they would only take in this first round of the course and then again just before the finish; the fence which was centrally placed in the infield and brought them past the water-jump before they bore to the outside of the track. There were five or six horses in this bunch, and they were setting a terrific pace. They were a knot of inter-blending colors—but the knot contained no black, no red-and-white. Twenty yards or so behind them, going fast, but not with such reckless fury, was another bunch—and still there was no black, no red-and-white. . . .

He was yet another twenty yards behind, solitary and laboring and seeming to lose more distance with every stride. He was last and long last. He was trailing. He wasn't in the race.

"Jesus!" said Mr. Fowler. "Jesus Christ!"

She gripped the edge of the table until her fingers ached. She couldn't see anything except that last lone horse—the big, black horse who must be Fitzgerald but who didn't have Fitzgerald's long, low sweeping stride; the big black horse who went choppily, galloping on top of the ground, veering this way and that; the big black horse who didn't settle down to run even after his rider's whip had cracked down behind the saddle in three powerful, useless strokes; the big black horse who didn't reach the first fence until the leading horses were almost at the second; the big black horse who jumped awkwardly, proppily, wasting so much in the height of his leap that he lost yards in length.

She heard the words of the loud speaker in a moment of clarity. ". . . going at a terrific pace! Ballyhoo's in the lead, with Sagebrush and Mohave hanging close. Then there's Arkle and Arkakle and Arkle-arkle—so close you could throw a blanket over the lot of 'em. . . . No casual-

ties yet, and they're coming into the third fence. . . . Oh-oh, Fancy Lass is down. . . ."

She shut her ears to it. She tried to look at the leaders, and saw that what had been ~~two~~ distinct bunches was now a scattered line, every here and there with a double thickness as two horses ran abreast. She saw a bad spill at the Liverpool—and tried dimly to make out which horse it was. But she couldn't keep her eyes on the race: she kept looking, in spite of herself, at the trailing, bouncing shape of Fitzgerald: he was going more unevenly, it seemed, with every hundred yards. He cleared the Liverpool in an enormous, wasteful leap, but he was a furlong or more behind the running. His rider had given up the whip, and seemed to be sitting him differently now. They were a clumsy pair. They had no place here. She tore her gaze away from them as they began to take the far turn and saw that the leaders of the field were almost opposite her now, thundering into the water-jump for the first time. There was an increase in the crowd-noises all around her. People began to shout. In front of her a woman stood up, waving both her arms and shouting "Ballyhoo! Come on, Ballyhoo—you show 'em! . . ."

Janet took her hands from the table and let them fall into her lap. She wanted to get up and go away but knew she couldn't. Her eyes burned and her throat felt stiff and she was utterly miserable, with a sick, spreading ache somewhere inside her.

She stared with wide and unblinking eyes and saw three horses rise to the over-high fence together and stretch in lovely, straining symphony of movement over the gleaming stretch of water. She saw another horse—a bright chestnut with wild, unbraided mane and tail—bury his near fore in the top of the brush and turn fantastically on end and seem

to poise in mid-air for a moment, his hind legs forking like a giant wishbone, before he crashed into the water with a great thudding splash and hurled his jockey clear to roll upon the turf at the water's edge.

She heard the long-drawn "Oooo-ool" of the crowd and the roaring of the speaker and the voices babbling all around her. She heard Mr. Fowler, the glasses still at his eyes, swearing steadily and monotonously to himself. She heard a woman say, "My God! Is he hurt?" and then laugh hysterically in relief as the fallen jockey picked himself up. She heard a man behind her say, "What did I tell you—watch that Durya, will you!"

She saw other horses jump the water, perhaps five of them, all without mishap. She saw that the furious pace was being maintained. She kept looking straight in front of her. There was a long interval—it seemed awfully long, ridiculously long—and then here was the strange Fitzgerald. He seemed to be trying to run out as he was driven toward the fence—but having been pulled in he jumped. He cleared the high fence by a foot instead of shaving it, and yet he landed a yard upon the farther side of the water. It was an awkward, idiotically spectacular leap—and there was a mixed chorus of 'oo-s' and chaff from the crowd. She felt hot and ashamed and furiously angry—although she wasn't clear about the object of the anger.

Mr. Fowler spoke to her for the first time since the race had begun. He said, "Well, he can *jump*," with a queer, rueful twist of his mouth.

She said, "Why doesn't he pull him out? . . . He ought to pull him out! . . . Why doesn't he quit? Why does he make a fool of himself? . . ."

She didn't turn her head. She stayed sitting as she was. In a minute, the leading horse would be on the far side

and nearing the Liverpool again and in her field of vision. She might watch them—or she might close her eyes. She began to wonder what she was going to say to Olivant when she saw him after the race. She felt sick.

She began to hear again. First the loud-speakers—  
“ . . . Durya’s the one to watch. She’s hanging third now—and there’s over a mile of this grueling test still to go. . . . Flagstaff’s in the lead still, and going well in hand. . . . There are eight horses left in the race, ladies and gentlemen. . . . ”

Then the shouting of the crowd; shouting studded with horse-names which meant nothing to her—“Durya. . . . Come on, Durya! . . . Attaboy, Flagstaff! . . . Watch that Bonaparte hang on there, willya! . . . ”

Then, although they were very quiet and conversational—perhaps because they were quiet and conversational—the voices of two men at the table immediately behind her. One of the voices was deep and rough and vaguely Western; the other was mild and sure and nostalgically New Yorkish. She heard the first speech without thinking, and the second—and then she thought about what they were saying and couldn’t stop listening to them even when she tried.

“Told you that mare Durya was the bet. Why the hell did I pay any ’tention to you.”

“Okay. I made a mistake. But I used to pick up a lot of change following Dick Olivant—quite a while ago, though.”

“All we’ll pick up today’s a loada manure!”

The leading horses came into the Liverpool, two abreast and one close behind them which rapped badly but recovered. Janet didn’t want to watch, but her eyes were interested. The third horse passed the other two as they landed, and the loudspeaker became emphatic.

"We told you to watch Durya, ladies and arklemen! We told you to watch Durya! . . ."

"Why, God damn!" exploded the Western voice. "Will you get a loada the crowbait that's carryin' my good dough! . . . Fitzgerald! How c'n a horse run with a handle like that, anyway?"

"Thing's green, that's all. But I do mean green! . . . Wants waking up. A battery might do the trick."

"Battery nothing! That thing wouldn't run if you goosed it with a red-hot poker!"

Fitzgerald, going more choppily than ever, came into her sight—and Janet closed her eyes. She made a little movement as if to get to her feet and then relaxed again. She opened her eyes. She looked at the fence near the far turn and saw a horse down and the others in a tighter bunch than they had been. She flicked a backward glance and saw that Fitzgerald was over the Liverpool. She looked straight ahead again. In her lap her hands twisted together.

"They're almost into the stretch again. . . . They'll be coming down to the water in a minute, after this next fence. . . . Oh-oh! Bonaparte hit that fence and shed his jonkle! They're going a terrific pace—how can they keenkle up. . . ."

Against her will, she moved her eyes. She didn't look sharply to her left, where the race was drawing ever nearer; she looked half-left, diagonally across the course toward the far turn.

She saw Fitzgerald again—and she saw something which her eyes didn't believe. He had just jumped the fence on the turn and was coming along the curving end of the course. She saw the figure of his rider shift slightly on the saddle; she saw its right arm go outward and forward in a flashing arc, the whip it was holding a thin, almost invisible



line which must, incredibly, be aimed at the black nose! She saw Fitzgerald swerve sharply to the left with the blow, putting a bucking half-leap into his stride which should have unseated the rider but didn't even move him.

Someone else saw too—and a hot wave of shame enveloped her.

"I'll be God-damned!" said the New York voice unbelievably.

She told her eyes to close, but they wouldn't. They seemed to want proof that Richard Olivant could be so utterly lost to all sense. They saw a quick flurry of the rider's arms as the rein and whip changed places—and they saw the left arm repeat the incredible action!

She closed them. But she couldn't close her ears. The thunder of the approaching leaders was in them, swelling with every second, but through it came the voice from behind her.

"Well I'll be God-damned!" it said again—and then, on a new, high note she couldn't understand, "Hey! Hey! Look at *that!*"

She thought it said more, but it was drowned in the roaring and shouting and movement all around her as the leaders came into the wings of the water-jump. She opened her eyes: if she looked at these horses perhaps she wouldn't have to think about that other horse so far behind them. The mare Durya led by a length. She barely cleared the water and went on. A cluster of three horses took it next; then two more; then the riderless Bonaparte, rein and stirrups flying, making a sterling effort to keep up, worried and uncertain without that collecting, steadying, controlling force upon his back.

They were past. She sat absolutely still, trying not to think and seeming momentarily to succeed.

"My God! My God!" The New York voice was almost chanting. "Never saw anything like it! Hey, Ronnie, will you look! Never saw anything like it!"

Mr. Fowler's hand dropped suddenly onto her shoulder, its long thin fingers squeezing painfully. He was babbling something which she didn't hear at first, then made out to be, "It's too late! It's too late!"

A suspicion pierced her mind: it was ridiculous, it was fantastic—but she turned her head to the left in one frightened, darting glance—and then shot to her feet like a marionette pulled up too sharply by a novice hand.

Fitzgerald was running. He was unbelievably near. He was nearer than he could possibly be. He was running. His stride was so long that his belly seemed only a few inches from the turf. He was running. He came straight, like an arrow; like a machine of flesh and blood. He was running. His rider was very still on him now, and hunched in a tight, neat curve along his neck.

Her mouth opened but no sound came out of it.

"It's too late!" The old man was still babbling. "Damn it to hell, it's too late!"

Fitzgerald drew nearer. He came at a tremendous pace. She'd never seen a horse move so fast. She'd never seen such a stride, not even in the top horses of the flat, not even in the chunky, great-hearted 'Biscuit, not even in the long-legged, lovely War Admiral.

"For Christ's sake!" came the voice from behind her.

Around her the crowd hummed and murmured about the other forgotten horses, and above her the iron voice blared out unheard words about them. She felt she was on a little island in this sea of people—an island made of herself, and of Mr. Fowler, and of the voice behind.

Fitzgerald was almost at the wings of the water-fence now—and she was suddenly terrified by the speed.

“God!” There was fear in the voice. “He can’t make it at that pace! Take a pull at him, man!” It was rising to a high-pitched shout. “*Steady him, for Christ’s sake!*”

But the pace was unchecked, utterly unchecked. They came into the wings, man and horse, as if there were nothing in front of them, no five-foot fence, no seven-foot stretch of water on the far side of it.

And they took off while they were still four yards or more from the brush—much too early, disastrously early. . . .

“Uph. . . .” grunted the voice, with a quick, indrawn hissing of breath.

Her eyes wouldn’t close—though she knew the awful fall they must inevitably see.

But the black shape lifted in a perfect, a tremendous, a flawless arc. And the curled-up, white-bandaged forelegs hissed through the topmost two inches of the brush and then stretched out in slow, perfect rhythm. And they hit the turf—the left hoof, then the right—a good ten feet beyond the edge of the water.

A small, strangled sound came from Janet’s mouth—and in her ears, through the myriad other noises, were the shrill yelpings of Mr. Fowler and a stream of joyous, amazed profanities from the voice.

She found herself gripping Mr. Fowler’s arm in both hands and shaking it. He turned and looked down at her. A wide smile was splitting his wrinkled face.

He said, “Damn if that ain’t a horse! . . .” The smile faded. “Too bad he didn’t make up his mind a little sooner.”

She went on shaking the arm. “It doesn’t matter,” she

kept saying. "It doesn't matter! He's running. He's a race-horse! He's a great racehorse!"

She managed to look at the race again, as a race. The bunch was a little more strung out now. Durya was still in the lead. She was just rounding the bottom curve and coming to the fence before the Liverpool. There were two horses neck-and-neck about a length and a half behind her, and behind these were three more, the last of them straggling. The riderless Bonaparte had given up. He was in the center of the infield now, and standing. Fitzgerald, impossibly, was turning into the bottom curve. He was much too far behind, of course, but it didn't matter. He was running and jumping as she had never seen any horse run and jump before.

She wasn't numb any more; she was vividly, tinglingly alive—and aware of everything. She could even hear the loud-speakers and take in what they were saying.

"It's still Durya. . . . She's increased her lead to about two lengths. Flagstaff's still second—and, yes, he's pulling away from Mohave. . . . It looks as if Flagstaff may challenge Durya—that's what it looks like. . . ."

Then the voice from behind her—and its companion again.

"For anysake, Ronnie, will you look at that Fitzgerald! Will you look at that Olivant and that horse! If you live to be a million you'll never see a horse go like that!"

"Uh-huh. He's goin' all right. He cert'nly is! But he can't make it. Why did the fella leave it s' late?"

"Never mind that! Why worry about your piddling money! You're watching a horse—and one hell of a horse-man! Watch 'em, man! . . ." He didn't seem to be able to stop talking. "Never saw anything like it! Green horse—wants a shock—got to have a shock—what's the guy do?"

—takes one chance in ten thousand!—clips him over the beezers, one on each side! . . . Never saw anything like it! What a gamble! Either ruin the nag—or make the shock work. . . . Ruin nine out of ten—but does it ruin this one? See for yourself! . . . What a guy! And what a *hell* of a horse!”

She dropped her hold of Mr. Fowler’s arm; then clutched at it again. She stared as if her eyes would jump from her head. Something impossible was happening. She held her breath and her heart thumped in her ears. Fitzgerald had turned into the back stretch. He had jumped the fence just after the turn. His amazing stride hadn’t faltered, hadn’t varied—unless it were even longer. He was coming into the Liverpool, and the other horses—even Durya in the lead—weren’t to the far turn yet and were visibly coming back to him. You could see, now, that he was going at a pace tremendously faster than theirs. He seemed to be running as if he were just leaving the gate in a six-furlong sprint on the flat. There wasn’t time for him to catch them, of course. . . . There wasn’t time. . . . There couldn’t be time. . . .

He went into the Liverpool at the same appalling pace—and now she did close her eyes. When she opened them he was over it and going even faster—and . . . and . . . he was passing the last two horses of the straggling tail.

“Hey!” said the New Yorker. “Hey! I believe . . .”

His voice was drowned by a sudden, frantic burst of sound from the loud-speakers. The announcer was stuttering and gulping in excitement. “There’s another horse in the race! . . . It seems impossible, but there’s another horse. . . . Fitzgerald. . . . Number Seven on your cards. . . . Fitzgerald. . . .”

She couldn’t hear it any more. She couldn’t hear any-

thing. She was all eyes. Her mouth was open and her throat was working, but she couldn't hear anything. She was beating with her fists at Mr. Fowler's shoulder. He was jumping up and down, the glasses glued to his eyes. Behind her a chair fell down. It hit her calves and she kicked it away. People in front of her were standing. A man's hat blocked her view. She leaned forward and thrust violently at his shoulder and he shifted without looking around.

She saw that Durya was on the backstretch, beginning to take the last, short turn which would bring her to the central jump, the fence which was only about two hundred yards from the finish-line. She saw that there were two horses bunched together ten lengths behind the mare—and one of them pulled away and it was Fitzgerald.

She heard something. For no reason at all she heard something—one isolated thread of sound stabbing through the enveloping roar; the voice of the man behind her. It was saying, "The watch! The watch! Give me that stop-watch, God damn you!"

Durya was over the fence. Her tail was up. She was tired. Her jockey looked back, underneath his arm, and went to the whip and the mare spurted gallantly.

Fitzgerald was over the fence. He was six lengths behind—and there was less—much less—than a furlong for the mare to go. Her jockey flailed at her. Fitzgerald gained with every stride. Olivant was hand-riding now. The distance closed—to two lengths—to one. But the flag was so near.

Janet's throat ached. She supposed she must be shouting. She kept pounding at Mr. Fowler's shoulder with her fists. Something was pounding at her own shoulder.

The flag was such a little way from Durya's nose. But there was a black nose at her quarter now . . . at her

shoulder . . . level with her nose and past it . . . and she'd run her race and been beaten; beaten by a clear three-quarters of a length in the last twenty feet.

The crowd went mad for a few moments and Janet found herself with her hands on Mr. Fowler's shoulders and his long arms wrapped around her. She felt weak and shaking, and when she tried to speak only a hoarse croak came from her mouth.

They dropped into their chairs and smiled at each other. The noise of the crowd died down and the loud-speaker said something about a course-record having been broken and the voice behind—the New York voice—was repeating something over and over again.

"Greatest horse I ever saw!" it was saying. "Greatest horse I ever saw!"

And then it said, "Look at the watch, Ronnie. For God's sake look at the watch. That's the last eighth—the last eighth—in a two-and-a-half-mile 'chase. I don't believe it—but there it is! Greatest horse I ever saw!"

Janet turned in her chair to look at him for the first time. She could tell at once which of the two men he was.

She stretched out her hand toward him.

"Excuse me," she said hoarsely, "but would you mind shaking hands?"

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## Chapter Nine

THE big windows of the dining room were open to the verandah and the soft air which drifted through them brought the smell of the sea and sometimes, when the music wasn't too loud, the sound of it. The great room was full, and so was the dance-floor beyond the archway, and so was the long, raised bar at the other side and the Casino beyond it.

They had nearly finished dinner, and from their corner table Janet looked around her curiously.

"It's funny," she said. "This crowd must be ninety-nine and a half per cent American. And the waiters certainly are. So how do you know you aren't in America? Because you do know. I mean, I'd know if I'd never seen or heard of *Ventana del Soledad* before and you brought me here blindfolded."

Mr. Fowler said, "Must be that difference in the air we was talkin' about," and then turned away to watch the waiter opening the latest bottle of champagne and to tell him that this must positively *not* be put on Mr. Olivant's bill but charged to him.

Olivant smiled across the table at her but didn't speak. She felt happy and well fed and rested—but not at peace. She said:

"What does it mean, *Ventana del Soledad*? I've just realized that I haven't any idea."



He smiled at her again. "Window to—or more literally of—the Desert."

"Oh, nice!" she said. "And it's absolutely true—when you go out there in the gardens and look through the little canyon towards the track, it is like a window. . . ."

She cut herself short as the waiter began to fill her glass. . . . She was only talking anyway: she wondered why she bothered to talk.

Olivant looked at his glass and said, "This your doing, Fowler? We'd better go easy." He didn't look tired any more, Janet thought. He looked young—and sort of sternly satisfied.

The glasses were filled and the old man raised his and beamed around the table.

He said, "Once more, fellows: to the greatest horse in the history of steeplechasin'!" He looked at Janet. "Did I get it right?"

She laughed at him. "Even if you didn't, it'll do." She raised her glass and drank and watched the men while they did.

"I'll give you another," she said, and looked at Olivant. "No, you can't drink this time. To a man I heard described this afternoon as 'one hell of a horseman'; to a man who took a hell of a chance—and brought it off."

"Fine!" said the old man. "Fine!" and drained his glass.

Olivant looked at Janet, and the one-sided smile lit up his face. "It was a hell of a chance," he said. "But I had to do something. Took me half an hour to rub those welts off his nose. Thank God he'll never need 'em again."

Mr. Fowler folded his napkin and set it down beside his glass and stood up.

He said, "You won't be seein' me for an hour or so," and looked down at Janet. "Got five dollars handy?"

She was a little surprised, but she opened her purse and found a five-dollar bill and handed it to him—and then was more surprised when he took a pen from his pocket and marked a big J upon the corner.

He said to Olivant, "You got five dollars?" and then when he had the money, marked it with an R and put both the bills into his pocket.

"What're you doing?" Janet said.

He chuckled. "Goin' to find my place in the pattern," he said—and marched off toward the bar.

Janet laughed—and Olivant said sharply, "What was that crack?"

She said, "Oh, I see, he's going to the Casino." She laughed again. "The crack was about a present he gave me this morning. A book of yours."

Olivant frowned for a moment, then grinned. He didn't say anything, but reached over and took the bottle from its ice-pail and refilled their glasses.

Janet said, "I thought you were the one who was talking about going easy." She looked in the direction Mr. Fowler had taken. "Does he always gamble when he gets a chance?"

"Does he always gamble? . . . Do you mean to say you don't know about him? You never heard of George Fowler—the legendary George Fowler?"

Janet stared. "Oh . . . so that's what he was, is it? A gambler. . . . Oh, that explains a lot! It explains everything." She pondered over the revelation for a moment. "I bet he was straight," she said suddenly. "He must have been!"

"Naturally." He seemed faintly surprised; then smiled again. "Ran with some pretty . . . strange people at times, of course."

"How did you meet him? I'm terribly curious. I don't

understand you two being . . . Oh, never mind: just tell me how you first came to know each other. Please."

The smile had left his mouth but was still in his eyes. He lifted his glass and drank before he answered her.

"That's a long story," he said at last. "Perhaps you'll never hear it."

She was going to protest; then changed her mind. It would only be talk, anyway: she wondered why they bothered to talk.

He said, "I don't want to talk about Fowler. I don't even want to talk about myself. Or Fitzgerald."

She said, "You amaze me." Just some words.

"I want to talk about you," he said. "I'm going to talk about you."

He stopped again. She smiled at him, but she didn't dare to meet his eyes: she knew what would happen if she did. She took a sip from her glass; she didn't want it, but it was something to do.

He said, "In the first place, you are looking more than usually beautiful. And that, I might add, is saying a great deal. But there's something I don't understand: when you came over to the stables after the race, you were wearing a suit—a grey suit and a red hat. Whence the dress—which is a charming dress—and the new hair-arrangement, which is even more charming?"

She met his eyes now—and it was a moment before she spoke. She said:

"If I tell you, you won't stop, will you? . . . I knew we were going to have dinner here, and hoped it was going to be a celebration. I brought the dress with me—and bribed myself into a bathroom. So there's no mystery, really."

"I was afraid that was the answer," he said.

"Afraid?"

"Definitely. When I first saw you here, I thought the change might mean you and Fowler had taken rooms for the night."

"No," she said. "No. He has to go back—and I have an idea he oughtn't to be late." She took a cigarette from the pack on the table and busied herself lighting it.

Their waiter came with coffee, and neither spoke until he had gone. In the ballroom the orchestra was playing a rhumba tune she'd never heard before. Its rhythms were insistent and disturbing.

"Why don't you?" Olivant said suddenly.

"Why don't I what?"

"Stay overnight. You can have my bungalow, and I'll find a couple of rooms for myself and Fowler."

"And both you and I get shot tomorrow by the Greek for leading his charge astray?" The music was swelling in her head, pulsing through her body. She said, suddenly, "Do you dance this sort of thing?"

He smiled at her. "Enough," he said, and pushed back his chair and stood up—and in a minute they were walking across to the archway and the music was growing louder and more insistent with every step they took.

They danced without speaking. The vast floor was comfortably filled but not crowded. He was easy—beautifully easy—to dance with. He made her feel that she had never danced so well before. She could feel each finger of the hand which held her hand, and each finger of the other hand which was strong and gentle against her back.

The music stopped. There was applause—and then another tune.

"Not this one," Janet said, and they turned toward the archway to the dining room again. It was momentarily

crowded by a conflict of leaving and arriving dancers, and they stood aside for a moment. They were very close.

She said, "Thank you. That was . . . was . . ." She couldn't find a word which felt right. "I loved that," she said.

He took her arm and moved forward as the archway cleared.

"Me too," he said. "And your hair smells wonderful."

She had a sudden flash of memory and looked at him quickly. But he laughed at her.

"You told me not to stop," he said. "And it's true anyway."

As they came through into the dining room, the long thin form of Mr. Fowler levered itself away from the wall and stood in their path.

"Hi there!" He beamed at them. "I been watchin'."

"How were we?" Janet said.

"Fine!" said the old man. "Fine!" and went on talking as they walked toward their table. He said:

"You were grand. You both looked as if you liked it. And neither one of you had that look on their face like most rhumba couples get, especially when they think they're good."

They reached the table and sat down. "You know the look I mean," Mr. Fowler said. "It's like they didn't know they had a partner and was up there workin' solo—like they was lookin' at themselves out of the backs of their eyes."

He had been fumbling in one of his jacket pockets while he was talking, and now produced a thick wad of bills which he spread out flat upon the table.

"Coffee, Mr. Fowler?" Janet asked.

He shook his head. "But you might get Rich to fill up

for me." He pushed his empty glass across the table and while Olivant filled it began to count the money.

He finished counting and took a great swig from his glass and pushed the pile of bills over to Janet. She looked at them in astonishment, and saw that the topmost was the five with her initial on it.

"That's you done," said the old man. He was still chuckling as he took his second swig of wine. He choked—and that seemed to make him laugh all the more.

Janet stared at the pile of money. "I don't understand," she said.

Olivant laughed. "He's been playing up five dollars for you," he said. "Don't be haughty. Just grab it."

"No need to count 'em." The old man was beaming at her. "Three hundred flat. Pretty nice goin' in the time." He drained his glass and stood up while she was still trying to find something to say. He patted Olivant on the shoulder and said, "Your turn now, bud. Back in a flash with the cash!" and was gone again.

"Bless him!" said Janet. She picked up the money and folded it and put it in her purse, already bulky with her winnings on Fitzgerald. She said:

"I love money, don't you? I'm having a wonderful day! First you and Fitz, paying that amazing price. And now this! I wonder how much he'll make for you." She turned automatically to look in the direction which Mr. Fowler had taken and saw with surprise that he was still in the room. He was standing by the wide, shallow stairway which led to the bar. He was talking to another man; a tall, broad-shouldered man with close-cut white hair and well-cut clothes. There was something vaguely familiar about the back; about the tilt of the head and the deep red tan of the neck.

She said, "Who's that he's talking to?" and pointed. "I feel as if I ought to know . . ."

She broke off as the back turned around and she saw a blunt face with heavy dark brows and a white mustache which bristled.

She said, "I do know him. But I can't remember where or what—or anything."

"Looks Army," said Olivant. "Oh, damn! Fowler's bringing him over."

The word "Army" was the key: she remembered now, he was the officer who had held Mac's head and talked to her. She had liked him. She remembered his eyes. In a minute she'd remember his name. Someone had called out to him, calling "Colonel" Something. What was it?

She said hurriedly, "He's nice," and then had to stop because he was there, beside the table, and Olivant was getting to his feet.

Mr. Fowler said, "Miss Elliot—like you to meet my friend Colonel Tiernay—or is it 'General' now?" His marquis manner was very much in evidence.

The white mustache lifted at the corners as Tiernay smiled.

"Not yet," he said. "It's not official until next week." He bowed to Janet and was murmuring politely when he noticed her wide smile of recognition. He said, "Excuse me, ma'am, but haven't we met?"

Janet said, "Very informally. You were awfully nice to me. You held El McTavish's head while they moved the Army out of my way."

He smiled delightedly. His brown eyes were very warm. "That's right," he said. "Delighted to meet you again, ma'am!"

"An' here's the Equinine Sensation," said Mr. Fowler, grinning. "Mr. Richard Olivant—Colonel Tiernay."

Olivant shook hands silently, and Tiernay said:

"Very glad to meet you, sir—after all these years. That performance this afternoon was . . . nothing short of historic, sir."

"Uh . . . thanks." Olivant was a little stiff in his manner. "Won't you sit down and have a drink with us?" Janet hoped that she was the only one to catch the reluctance in his voice.

"Why, thank you," Tiernay said and sat in the chair which Mr. Fowler had used while the old man himself button-holed a passing maître d'hotel and talked to him vehemently for a moment and then said, "Drinks on me. Be back pronto," and hurried away.

Olivant said, "What was that about 'after all these years,' Colonel?" and won Janet's approval for at least making an effort.

"I've seen you ride so often." Tiernay was smiling at both of them while he spoke. "And in so many different countries. I've only missed meeting you by accident." He laughed. "Won a lot of money on you, too, sir."

The wine-waiter came and ceremoniously set down goblets in front of each of them and a bottle before Olivant.

"Different countries?" Janet smiled encouragingly at the soldier. She was curious: she was going to hear about Olivant. She resolutely avoided his glance.

Tiernay laughed. "Yes, Miss Elliot. Three of 'em, to be exact. Here in the States—and in France at Auteil—and in Liverpool, England."

Olivant said, "That's a long time ago. Have some brandy?" He poured splashes into the goblets. Janet saw



that a little frown was drawing his eyebrows together. She said to Tiernay:

"Was he pulling off surprises in those days? Like this afternoon's?"

"He always did a wonderful job." The Colonel was surprisingly earnest. "That National in '26—if that loose horse hadn't fouled you, you'd 've been the first all-American winner."

Olivant shrugged. "There was a long way to go still." He twisted the brandy bottle to look at the label. "Fowler did us proud," he said, and began to warm his glass.

Janet was staring at him. "That's a pretty high-grade bushel you've been using," she said.

He looked at her blankly for a moment, but when she added, "Asbestos finish, I suppose?" he grinned.

Colonel Tiernay, out of his depth, looked from one to the other with a placid smile of non-comprehension—and Janet felt guilty and was about to make a determined plunge into small talk when he made it unnecessary.

"Mr. Olivant," he said, "I want to assure you, sir, that I'm not just butting in here to drink your excellent brandy and—'mm—irritate you with a lot of—'mm—chatter. I had a very definite purpose in getting George Fowler to introduce me to you—" he half-turned toward Janet and made a little bow with his head and shoulders—"and Miss Elliot. I want to congratulate you on that truly remarkable horse—and I wished to make an appointment with you on a matter of business—'mm—the earlier the better."

Olivant looked at him quickly. "What sort of business?" The tone was curt—and Janet's curiosity became tinged with embarrassment.

But Tiernay smiled. "Army business," he said. "Federal business."

Janet thought: *What in the world is all this?* and looked at Olivant and saw that he was frowning.

He said, "About horses?" even more abruptly than he'd spoken before.

"Exactly, sir." Tiernay was unruffled. "About horses. . . . Now, when would it be convenient for you to give me a few minutes of your time?"

Olivant lifted his shoulders again. "Take long?" he said.

"No, no. A very few minutes." Colonel Tiernay, without turning a hair, swallowed three-quarters of his brandy at a gulp.

"Like to get it over now?" Olivant's abruptness was growing more and more marked—and Janet wondered whether she could reach to kick him under the table without being seen.

He said, "Don't worry about Miss Elliot being here, Colonel. We're partners," and she was glad she hadn't kicked him. But she did wish she could understand the cause of the growing tension in the air.

"Delighted in that case," said Tiernay. "I'll have to do some explaining—but I'll be as brief as I can. It must be clear to you, sir, as an intelligent man, that the expansion of our Army isn't just a matter of a couple of years, or even the duration of this war. And in the long run, too, it isn't a question of—'mm—'inducting' a million civilians every so often and giving them a few months of hurried training."

"So a large standing Army's required for many years," said Olivant. "So where do I come in?" Very cleverly, the speech was not—was *just* not—an interruption. It slid neatly in after the other man's last sentence, but the impatience of the tone was undisguised, and Janet grew more uncomfortable.

Tiernay said, "Exactly. Exactly." He didn't seem in the

least disconcerted. "I knew you'd understand. . . . Well, sir, the popular idea that the Horse has been entirely displaced by the Machine for military purposes is completely erroneous."

Olivant said, "'Give me some Cavalry and the other fellow none, and I'll whip him.'" Again he had escaped interrupting by a hair's breadth. "If that isn't Clausewitz, it ought to be—and I *still* say, where do I come in?"

Tiernay laughed. "I can see I don't have to waste time with you, sir." He disposed of the rest of his brandy with a flick of his wrist and an ironclad swallow. "Well, there's a great expansion of the mounted arm being planned—and the War Department's set up a new organization for dealing with Remounts and Replacements—and Breeding." He paused for a moment, clearing his throat.

"It hasn't been officially quoted yet," he said, "but—'mm, 'mm—I shall be in command." He laughed self-consciously and the white mustache bristled and a deeper tinge of red came to the tan of his face.

Janet wanted to pat him, and was angry when Olivant said brusquely, "You're wasting your time, Colonel Tiernay."

"Now don't go so fast," Tiernay said. He was still smiling and courteous.

"Only saving you trouble." The V-shaped frown between Olivant's eyes was deep, and he didn't look at Janet. He said, "There's nothing doing. Nothing at all. Have some brandy?"

"Thank you, no more for me." Tiernay waved aside the proffered bottle. "Now see here, sir, won't you at least discuss the question? For instance, I can assure you the matter of money wouldn't be any bar."

Janet said, "I can't stand this any longer. What exactly are you two talking about?"

"Fitzgerald," said Olivant. He looked at her, she felt with a little pang, as if she were a stranger. "Didn't you see it coming? He wants me to sell Fitzgerald to Uncle Sam."

Tiernay said, "He's too quick for me, Miss Elliot."

She didn't look at Olivant again; she looked into the brown eyes which were so curiously gentle.

"Is he right?" she said.

The white head nodded. "In the main, ma'am, yes." He turned to Olivant again. "But there might be some other arrangement we could make."

"Believe me, there isn't." Olivant wasn't frowning now, but his face was blank of all expression. "Can I go on record as *meaning* that?"

Janet said quickly, "Colonel Tiernay—perhaps you don't quite understand how much Fitzgerald means to . . . to him." She felt Olivant's eyes on her and dropped this hurriedly. "I'm afraid it's no use trying to persuade him," she finished lamely.

Tiernay laughed. "I'm stubborn as a transport mule, ma'am. I shall keep on trying."

"For God's sake!" said Olivant. "Look, man! There're hundreds of first-rate thoroughbred studs in the country—and some of 'em must be buyable. Go after *them*—and quit bothering me!"

There was a silence. To Janet, staring miserably down at the tablecloth, it seemed to last five minutes. But it was broken at last by Tiernay—and she felt less wretched as soon as he spoke: his tone was unchanged, and when she looked at him she saw that although there was no smile on his face neither was there any sign of anger.

"Mr. Olivant," he said, "I have—'mm—several jobs to do, and one of them is to get the very best of the sort of thoroughbred we need in the Army. In the long run, I only have—'mm—my own opinion to base decisions on, and in my opinion one of the stallions we need is that horse of yours. The line's a fine, pure line—and the horse, sir, is a great horse! I don't want to sound—'mm—as if I were flag-waving, but here's an opportunity for you to make some sacrifice for your country, and without losing any money. Or, if you feel that you can't actually transfer ownership of the horse, why can't we arrange to have service from him, and then agree . . ."

"Colonel Tiernay!" The tone was so peremptory and the interruption this time so deliberate that Janet winced. She wanted to look away but couldn't. She saw Olivant lean over the table toward the soldier and, with his angry eyes fixed upon the calm brown ones, punctuate the four words of his speech with a forefinger which thudded upon the table. He said, very slowly and very quietly, but somehow violently:

"I—am—not—interested!" And then he said, sitting back in his chair, "Have I made myself clear now?"

"All right," Tiernay said. "I won't worry you any more—just at present." Miraculously, he laughed. His voice was as easy and pleasant as it had been all the time.

He said, "And I mustn't stay here chatting any more," and glanced at the watch on his wrist. "Have to meet some people in San Pietro," He stood up and bowed to Janet, and she held out her hand.

He took it and said, "Good night, Miss Elliot—a great pleasure to meet you," and then turned as Olivant got to his feet.

"And good night to you, Mr. Olivant," he said. "Thanks

for the drink—and congratulations on that race this afternoon. A magnificent performance!”

And then he was gone. Olivant sat down again. He looked at Janet and mutely offered her brandy and when she shook her head poured some into his own glass.

She said suddenly, “You are a bit of a bastard, aren’t you?”

He looked at her: one of his eyebrows seemed to be higher than the other.

“You called me that once before,” he said. “But you smiled this time.”

There was nothing to say to that—and she kept quiet. After a moment, she pushed her glass toward him and he poured brandy into it. She wondered how she felt and wasn’t sure.

They sat in silence—and then Mr. Fowler was beside them, and slipping into the empty chair. He said, “Army evacuated, huh?” and slapped a pile of bills down in front of Olivant and tipped a big shot of brandy into the glass which Tiernay had used.

He said, “Hundred and eighty-five for you, Rich. Can’t waste any more time on you.” He downed the brandy at a gulp and stood up again. Janet thought he looked a little pale, with vivid red patches over each cheek-bone. She started to ask him whether he was tired, but cut herself short as he began to speak himself.

He said, “Now for some *real* play! See you later.” He turned away from the table and then back again. He bent over them and said, “What d’you know! These tables are *straight!*” and then was gone.

Janet laughed. “Bless him!” she said. “He made me feel better.” She became aware that the orchestra was playing a tango she had always loved—*Don Jose Maria*. She said,

"Could we dance again?" and was touched by the alacrity with which Olivant got to his feet.

The music was right, and there were just enough people on the floor, and he danced even better than he had before, and all the discomforts and doubts and irritations imperceptibly dissolved. She was close to him and moving as one with him, and she could feel his hand lightly strong over her hand and his arm powerful around her. When the music stopped she joined in the applause and they danced the first encore, and then the second.

And then the band left the platform, and they went slowly back toward the dining room. She slipped her hand through his arm as they walked, and thought she felt his elbow press her fingers to his side.

They came through the archway and saw that two newcomers, a man and a woman, were being shown to the table next to theirs. The woman was large and plump and strident, the man small and worried.

Olivant held Janet's chair for her and then sat beside her, in the place which had been Mr. Fowler's. She said she was thirsty and wanted a long, cold drink and he beckoned the wine-waiter and went into a discussion in Spanish. While they were talking she listened to the couple at the next table. A waiter was hovering over the little man, who was staring vacantly at the enormous menu. The woman had a menu, too, which she seemed to be reading aloud for a moment—and then threw down.

"Look, Captain!" Her strident voice cut the air. "We know it's late, but we want the best in the house!"

"My God!" said Olivant.

"S-sh!" Janet nudged him. "Listen."

"I wanta steak," said the little man. His voice was astonishingly deep.

"Horace! You do not want a steak. Don't you pay any attention to my husband, Captain . . ."

"Steak!" said the deep voice. "New York. And French-fried potatoes—thick!"

"Oh, Horace!" The stridency was choked by imminent tears. "Oh, Horace!" Suddenly, startlingly, the woman began to cry, with loud, snuffling sobs. "Every y-year it's the sus-same. . . . We gug-go on a trip for our anni-anniversary—and you pick on mum-me. . . ."

Olivant stood up. "Come on," he said—and Janet, enormously relieved, found herself walking with him toward the open windows and the patio. The sobs of Mrs. Horace followed them in diminuendo, but when they were outside and seated at a table near the fountain she couldn't hear them any more.

Olivant called a waiter and gave an order and turned back to her.

She said, "What beastly people!" and took the cigarette he offered, and then the light.

He grinned. "Ugly sort of country around Wedlock," he said.

She laughed at that—and then, for no reason at all, thought of the valley and of square Abel Craddock and his wife—and of their farm and their children and their animals and the voice of Pepe Morales.

"Not always," she said. "Take the Craddocks, for instance."

"They're the exceptions," he said, "which prove the rule that matrimony's an insuperable hindrance to any real improvement in the social structure."

"Do you believe that? Or are you just being clever?" She tried to read the expression on his face, peering at him



in the faintly luminous darkness. She couldn't tell what sort of smile it was that he was smiling.

He said, "The whole idea of what's known as marriage is unsound. It's unsound fundamentally—but it's rooted so deep in tradition now that it needs a major upheaval to shake it loose."

She still couldn't see his face. She said, "I wish I knew whether you were serious," and then had to stop because the wine-waiter came with a tray which carried frosted glasses and a silver pitcher which clinked deliciously. He filled the glasses and waited anxiously for Olivant's sip and nod of approval and then faded into the darkness again.

She picked up her glass and tasted and then drank deeply. "Marvellous!" she said—and then, "I don't understand what you mean when you say 'fundamentally unsound.' How can it be?"

"In the beginning was Mother"—he sounded oracular—"with a great big capital M. Because you could always tell what womb a chap came out of but got into arguments about fatherhood, she was the Boss. So she founded Society and pulled down a resounding title for herself thousands of years later, when we started calling her a Matriarch. Before Dad took over the job of running Society—he became a Patriarch in the books—Mother invented Marriage. And her main reason for inventing it was feminine jealousy, maternal and straight. So the fundamental principle underlying matrimony is one of the basest of human emotions."

He stopped abruptly—and then said, "I rest," and she shifted her chair a little, still trying to see his face.

She said, "I *think* you're pulling my leg—but I can't be sure."

He laughed—and she still couldn't be sure. She said,

"I don't mind, anyway," and finished what was left in her glass.

They sat in silence again. But it was a good silence now. She was relaxed and peaceful—and yet there was a throbbing vivid excitement underneath the peace. The air was soft, and yet tingling with the smell of the sea. The hum of voices and the faintly heard music seemed a thousand miles away. She was cool and yet she glowed. She thought suddenly that she wasn't thinking and how lovely it was not to think. And then she found that she was thinking and that the thought wasn't a happy thought. She was thinking that she didn't want to leave here and go back with Mr. Fowler.

The sound of heavy, quick-striding footsteps broke the peace. They were coming from behind her, crossing the brick-paved patio toward the dining-room windows. There was something familiar about them. She saw Olivant look toward them sharply—and then they stopped and a bulky dark shape was standing by the table, looming over her.

She saw it was the Greek just as Olivant said, "Hello, Eddiel!" He seemed enormous, standing there in the darkness.

He didn't reply to Olivant. He spoke to her—in a dead, flat voice.

"You got the car keys?" he said.

She reached automatically for her purse. "How did you get here, Mr. Lenardos?" She wished she hadn't said that the minute it was out.

He said, "Came to get the old man. He's in the car. You coming?"

She was fumbling for the keys. She felt extraordinarily nervous. "I hope we haven't kept Mr. Fowler too . . ." She cut herself short as Olivant spoke.

He said, "I'll drive Miss Elliot back. And another time be civil when you speak to her." His voice was low and perfectly controlled—but there was a kind of jagged, dangerous edge to it which made Janet draw her breath in quickly. She fumbled desperately for the keys and couldn't find them.

The Greek was unmoved. He stood over them, bulky and motionless. He said:

"Listen—both of you! I gotta job: I'm keeping the old man alive. I've talked to his doctors, see? And I know what's the matter with him. It's his heart! And he don't have to have a lot of excitement. Someday, sometime, something's gonna go bingo in his ticker—and he's finished!"

He said, "He likes the both of you—that's okay. It's okay till you get giving him this excitement! And these late hours! Then it's not okay!"

He held out his hand, palm up, toward Janet. He stood there, waiting.

She found the keys. They were at the bottom of her change-purse. She pulled them out and dropped them into the outstretched hand.

The looming figure turned—and wasn't there any more. They could hear the quick, heavy footsteps receding.

Janet laughed, a little shakily. "How big do you feel?" she said. "I'm infinitesimal."

Olivant said, very slowly, "I could walk under a snake—with an opera hat on and without bending my knees." He filled the glasses from the pitcher, and they both drank.

She was worried. She said, "D'you think we really have done Mr. Fowler any harm? I . . . I hadn't any idea about his heart."

"I knew he had some vague heart-trouble. I didn't know exactly what—and I still don't." He was speaking slowly

and thoughtfully. "But I wouldn't worry yourself too much. I know my Fowler. He has to kick up once in a while—and he's probably better off with us than he would be in some other company."

"Yes," she said. "Yes. That's probably true—and it makes me feel better."

She lapsed into silence, trying to recapture that lovely state of not-thinking. She felt the softness of the air again, and the sharp tang of the sea in her nostrils, and through the near-darkness she could see the outline of his head. She heard the music in the distance, and the faint hum of voices, and felt peace again and the undercurrent of excitement.

But the moment she was conscious of that undercurrent, she found herself thinking again; thinking that now the old man was gone, and that she didn't have to go back with him. . . .

"Getting chilly out here, isn't it?" He spoke suddenly, startling her.

She said, "Is it? I hadn't noticed. Yes, perhaps it is."

He stood up without saying anything else—and in a minute they were walking slowly back toward the verandah and the windows of the dining room.

"I don't want to see Horace and his wife any more," she said—and he laughed and they altered their course a little and went in by the end window and made their way to the stairs and in a minute were standing at one side of the long bar and looking down at the crowded Casino.

"Want a drink?" he said, and she shook her head. In spite of the fans, the air was dry and filled with smoke, and the chatter of voices, blending with all the other sounds, seemed to saw at her nerves.

They stood for a moment uncertainly, and then she said, "I don't like it here, do you?"

He said, "No—not at all," and took her arm and muttered something which she couldn't catch—and they walked down into the Casino and across the end of it and out again through a door at the far side of the building.

They didn't say anything. He dropped his hand from her arm and they walked together in silence. They walked across the wide, sweeping drive where the gravel crunched beneath their feet and reminded her of the Inn, and Mc-Tavish, and the window which looked down into the little amphitheater. They left the drive and walked upon turf, past hedges and flower-beds which reminded her first of her childhood—and then of Bruce—and then, irrationally, of the Craddocks again. They passed the swimming-pool, deserted and gleaming cool in the faint light of the little moon.

They came to the bungalows—and outside one of them Olivant stopped. He took a key from his pocket and opened the door and switched on lights and she found herself inside and sitting upon the divan which was across the corner of the living room nearest the open doorway to the sleeping porch.

It was very quiet. There was no sound except the faint rumbling of the sea against the cliffs; no other sound at all until Olivant spoke. He was standing, looking down at her. He said:

"Better here, isn't it?" His voice sounded faintly unnatural. "And if you'll change your mind and have a drink—then I can have one." He didn't wait for her to answer, but crossed to a door in the far wall and went through it and came back in a few minutes with a bottle, and a siphon, and a bowl of ice, and two glasses.

It was an awkward load, and she helped him set it down on the low table by the divan. And, although she didn't want one, she let him mix her a drink.

When he'd made his own and was still standing, she said, "Why don't you sit down?" and he sat beside her and offered her a cigarette.

She said, "No, thank you," and then, very suddenly, "I believe you're shy!"

He stared at her. "By God!" he said. "I believe I am!"

He said, "That's the most extraordinary thing! . . . It must be because you're an extraordinary woman. Or mustn't it?"

"I *think* I'm flattered—but I'm not too sure. Tell me how I'm extraordinary."

"In your effect on me, for one thing. For another, I think you try to be honest—even with yourself."

"Only try?"

"That's a hell of a lot!" he said—and was silent, looking down at the glass he was twisting between his hands.

The silence went on and she could hear the sea again.

She said, "I've been wondering. . . . When do you think I'm going to be promoted?"

"Promoted?"

"Yes. At least, I suppose it's promotion to pass from acquaintance to friendship, isn't it?"

He set down the glass and turned to look at her. She met his eyes—and something changed: she'd been so much in command of herself, and of him, and of the situation—and now, suddenly, she wasn't.

He said, "You're rather a wonderful person!" and then his arms were about her and she turned her face to him and they kissed. . . .

She hadn't known it would be like this. She hadn't any

way of knowing it would be like this. She was caught up and borne along on a giant, unbelievable wave of emotion.

It was sweeping her away. She was afraid—and in despairing effort she strained back against his arms.

And at once she was free. She sat rigid, staring at him. She could only see his face as a misty blur, because her eyes were filled with tears. She tried to say something, and no word came but a strange sob forced its way from her.

He was concerned. She could hear the concern in his voice as he spoke to her.

"What is it?" he said. "What's the matter, darling?"

She forced herself to speak. "It's . . . nothing. . . . I'm just being a fool! . . . I . . . . Oh, don't pay any attention to me! . . ."

She was all right again. She was back again. She rubbed at her eyes with an angry impatient hand. She'd behaved like a child—and she wasn't a child. He was on his feet now, and she stood up quickly.

She said, "I'm sorry—for behaving like that," and then didn't say any more because his arms came about her again and she was pressed close to him—very close.

But he didn't kiss her. She turned her face up to his, but he didn't kiss her. His eyes were dark and troubled. There was fire behind them, but it was veiled by kindness. He said:

"This is . . . troubling you. . . . I want you. I want you like hell! But I don't want you to be troubled."

He took his arms from around her very suddenly. He bent over the table and picked up her glass. "I'll make you a new drink," he said, and turned away.

But she stopped him. She took the glass from his hand and set it down again.

“Wait,” she said. “Wait.” She went quickly past him and through the doorway and into the sleeping porch.

The sea was louder here in the half-darkness. It seemed very loud. It filled her ears. She looked out, but could see only the faintly moon-washed cliffs and the gentle gleaming below them.

She stood beside the bed and took off her clothes and let them lie in a soft pile about her feet. She stepped over them. There was a mist before her eyes, and it was difficult to breathe. In her ears was a rumbling, distant murmur—the sea, or the hammering of her heart.



## **BOOK THREE**



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## Chapter Ten

It was not until long after they had slipped away into the past that Janet made any attempt to sort out, historically, the four weeks which followed that day and night at Ventana—the day of Fitzgerald's first race, the night of her first union with Richard.

And when she did try, she found with baffled surprise that something had gone wrong with what she believed scenario-writers would call the *continuity*. She remembered everything—even little ridiculous unimportant things—with astonishing clarity, but she couldn't, for the life of her, place them in their right order. Her memory was like a card-index system which had gone wrong, with all the cards hopelessly shuffled and bearing no mark or number to help her in getting them back to their original sequence.

She supposed this must be because she had allowed herself to become so wrapped up in an ever-changing but narrow-horized present that she seemed, for all of that time, to be living in a box of misted glass whose walls enclosed only herself and Richard and the horses, with certain aspects of the valley as their world. Near the outside of the glass, so close that she was aware of their existence and even communicated with them, were a few other humans, such as Mr. Fowler, and Sherry, and once or twice the Craddocks—but, in the main, any other world than this,

or any other people, were only vague and half-perceived shapes and forces.

They were for the most part foggily far away, these outside elements, but they had a habit, terrifying in its haphazardness, of swooping out of the vague background and bulking dark against the outside of the glass and forcing her to remember and recognize their existence. Sometimes, even, it would seem that the glass melted at their approach, and she would have to face them, and the fact of their being, with a dreadful suddenness which gave her no time for defense or even preparation. And then Richard would be there, and his arms would be about her, and he would make the glass walls come back again. Sometimes, though, she didn't want the walls to come back—but he always made them. Always, that was, until she finally shattered them herself. . . .

She often tried again, after the first complete failure, to make her memory of that most important month take chronological sequence in her mind. But she never succeeded, no matter how long nor how hard she worked at it. Everything that had happened was there in her head, ineradicably there, but only as unrelated, utterly separate, items of happening; items which presented themselves to her memory always under the heading—'*. . . and then there was the time when —*'

*The time when* the alarm for once roused Richard first, and she waked in the grey light to see the sharply defined muscles of his back as he leaned away from her to reach for the clock and cut off its jangling clamor.

She said, "Hello, Richard," and turned over lazily and lay on her back with her hands beneath her head. .

He propped himself on an elbow and looked down at her.

"You look better in the morning," he said, "than any woman I've ever seen!"

"And how many have you seen—just in round numbers?"

He smiled and bent over her. "That's a pencil and paper job. And you don't really want to know."

She pushed him back. "But I *do*! I'm curious! I want to know all about all of them. Starting with your first and . . ."

"Ending with my last?" he said. "Now there—or here—you have something! Shall I show you?" He put out a hand as if to throw back the covers.

She clutched at them and laughed at him and said, "Your turn for coffee," and after a moment he climbed out of bed and found a robe and disappeared.

She hadn't moved when he came back with the coffee, and two cigarettes, already lighted, in his mouth. He gave her one of them after he'd put down the tray. He sat on the edge of the bed and looked at her.

"Penny," he said.

She took the cigarette out of her mouth and picked a bit of tobacco off the end of it. She said, slowly:

"Remember that . . . lecture you gave me on the Evils of Matrimony? It was at Ventana. . . ."

"And it was brought on by Horace and his shackle. Of course I remember." He was grinning at her: she knew he was, although she wasn't looking at him.

She said, hesitantly, "You were pulling my leg, weren't you?"

"I was giving you, Madam, a masterly résumé of a supportable viewpoint."

"But, personally, darling—" she wanted to stop, but couldn't—"do you honestly think, as Richard and not Professor Olivant, that marriage *has* to be a failure?"

He said, "I think I'd better get dressed—or Sherry'll be in the stables before I am."

"I don't care," she said impatiently. "They must all know, anyway."

"Take Minnie and Abel Craddock," she said. "You wouldn't call *them* a failure, would you?"

He stood up and went to the chair at the foot of the bed and came back with an armful of clothes and started to get into them.

He said, "You've been married, haven't you?"

Her heart sank. She nodded and didn't speak.

"Are you married now?"

"No."

"Did your husband die?"

She shook her head. She wanted to slap his face.

She said, "Someday I'm going to slap your face," and immediately felt better. She sat up in bed and smiled at him.

"Don't do it now," he said and pushed her back gently onto the pillows.

*The time when* George Murdock first came to talk to her about riding McTavish, and they made the deal then and there.

He was a short, thickset man with extraordinarily bowed legs and a violently-checked riding coat. He had a square, solemn, clean-shaven face which frequently split in a wide white smile which turned him into a top-heavy, friendly urchin. He muttered embarrassed things about Bruce's

death—and recalled, with amazing memory for detail, every one of his three previous meetings with Bruce's sister.

She felt oddly flattered—and very sure all of a sudden that George Murdock was the right man for McTavish. She took him down to the stables and told Sherry to put a halter on Mac and bring him out. Richard had Fitzgerald at the hitching rack, saddling him—and the two men nodded to each other, and Murdock spent a moment in silent admiration of the stallion.

But when Sherry led Mac out, the jockey turned straight to him without another glance for Fitzgerald—and Janet felt even warmer toward him, and more certain still that he was the right man. He walked all around the horse. He held his head a little to one side, in almost exactly the way Bruce had used to hold his. He went up to Mac and slapped the iron neck and grinned as a cynical, dubious eye was rolled at him.

He said, "Looks grand, Miss Elliot. You done a fine job on him!" He stepped back and renewed the inspection with his head more to one side than ever. "Sharpen him just a little—an' he's ready." He faced her fully now. "An' I'll be proud to have the ride," he said. "Any terms you like. I know this old feller. I seen plenty of his tail!"

They went down into the valley then, all of them. Richard rode Fitz, and Murdock Mac, while she ambled behind them on Terrapin the lead pony, with Sherry hanging onto her near stirrup-leather. Murdock rode very short; almost as short, it seemed to her, as if he were a flat-race jock. He looked bunched up and huddled—but he also looked strong and secure. And McTavish, very much to her surprise, behaved like a park hack.

When they had rounded the rock and were on the ride, she pulled up alongside the men and spoke to Murdock.

She said, "Want to give him a fence as well as breeze him?"

He took his eyes from the valley. "Wonderful spot!" he said—and then, "Why, sure, Miss Elliot. Can't be too early gettin' the feel of him."

They decided McTavish should do a full six furlongs, taking both fences—and she and Richard pulled into the willows opposite the first jump, while Sherry scuttled off to a vantage point on the other side of the ride. Murdock tightened his girths and shortened his leathers still another hole—and McTavish began his freezing act: she could actually see the constriction of his back, and feel the stiff awkwardness of his leg movements as Murdock turned him away and set him walking toward the end of the ride.

"Come on, feller!" said Murdock—and clapped his open palm hard on the ribs behind the saddle.

And McTavish stopped dead. Not only stopped dead, but actually curved his neck around as if to stare at the stranger on his back.

If she hadn't seen it, she would never have believed it. She giggled; a nervous little sound which startled her.

She said, "You know, except for an exercise boy—twice—he's never had anyone except Bruce on his back since he was broken. . . . And me, of course," she added.

She looked at Richard, and saw that he was frowning as he stared at McTavish and his rider.

"Don't like it," he said—and she followed his look with her own and saw that Murdock had the horse walking again. The walk was slow and stiff, but it was docile enough, and straight.

"Look at that," she said. "It's all right, Richard."

She glanced at him again, and saw that he was no longer gazing after Mac. His head was cocked a little to one side,



as if he were listening, and as far as she could tell he was looking, out of the corners of his eyes, at a spot in the willows behind her. His lips moved, and a faint whisper came from them.

"Hermit," he said. "Don't move. Let's see what he does."

There was a swift soft crackle of branches, a little splashing of water—and then silence again. Both Fitzgerald and the pony moved their heads and looked with placid interest in the direction of the sound.

"Damn it!" Richard said. "He's gone again."

She said, "I didn't do anything, did I? I know I didn't." She pushed Terrapin forward a little and looked up the ride and saw that McTavish was still walking. On the other side, halfway between the two jumps, she could see Sherry. He was sitting at the foot of the slope, his arms locked about his knees, his whole body tense, his head turned toward McTavish and the far end.

She pushed the pony still further forward, and saw that Murdock had pulled up. He was turning Mac around—and she realized suddenly that she was terribly excited. There was a movement beside her, as Richard brought Fitzgerald forward too. The stallion was tense, his ears pricked, his beautiful jet body taut and motionless.

She said, "Will Fitz be all right? I mean when . . ." and then stopped in mid-sentence, because Murdock had started McTavish.

She said, "Oh, look! Look!" and kept her gaze glued to the ride and the dark, onrushing, foreshortened shape of her horse. He seemed to be coming tremendously fast: Murdock was in a ball on his neck, and behind him the hoof-clods of brown soil sprayed into the air.

She said, "My God, he's running!" and sat down more

firmly on Terrapin's back and braced herself for the first fence as if she and the pony were going to take it.

Richard said something she didn't catch—and then, very distinctly, a worried "Oh-oh!"

She didn't understand it. Mac was almost into the wings of the fence, going hard and true and terribly fast. He was going to jump all right. . . . Of course he was going to jump. . . . Even if he didn't want to jump with this stranger on his back, he couldn't help it. . . . He couldn't stop at this pace, he *couldn't*. . . .

And then he stopped—incredibly, he stopped. There was a little cloud of brown earth as he dug his toes in and slid; slid and twisted; ended with his flank against the jump while the hurtling body of his rider soared over the brush to land with a thump which raised another, smaller brown cloud.

She felt sick—with apprehension and disappointment. Automatically, she started to push the pony forward, but was stopped abruptly by Richard's voice.

"Hold it!" he said sharply—and she saw that Murdock had come to his feet like a rubber toy and that McTavish was standing motionless, apparently studying his erstwhile rider over the top of the fence.

Richard was making violent signals to someone to stop, and she discovered that they were directed at Sherry, who was running along the edge of the ride. He saw the waving arm and pulled up—and by the time she looked at McTavish again, Murdock had him. He started to walk toward them, leading Mac and wiping at his own face with a big handkerchief. She saw dark stains on the whiteness—and was absurdly relieved when the handkerchief came down to reveal a wide grin which, combined with the dirt and a little blood, made him more friendly and more urchin-

like than ever. She smiled back at him, then turned to speak to Richard. But there wasn't time: he wasn't looking at her, and Murdock was close.

She said, "Are you all right, Mr. Murdock?"

"Fine!" The grin was wider than ever. "Say! Has this one got brakes!"

"I can't understand it." She was uncomfortable and uncertain. "I never thought I'd see *him* stop." She didn't know what to say. She darted a glance at Richard again, but he still wasn't looking at her.

Murdock said, "Wasn't any fault o' his. Guess I was ridin' him wrong." He laughed, dabbing at his face again with the handkerchief. "Boy! C'n he give a shoulder!" He slipped the rein back over McTavish's head and patted him on the neck and turned to Janet again. "I'm just tryin' to call to mind, Miss Elliot, how Bruce rode him into his fences. Maybe I didn't give him enough head, huh?"

She stared at him, feeling foolish. She hadn't noticed his riding or anything about him. Her eyes had been all for McTavish. She was ashamed of herself. She turned to Richard again.

"What do you think, Richard?" she said—and felt a ridiculous wave of color in her face.

He looked down at Murdock, "I think you gave him too much head. I saw Elliot ride once, and he jumped this horse with a deep seat and a strong hold. Body forward—but he didn't get off the saddle. And he kept the hold."

Murdock digested this gravely. "B'lieve you're right," he said, and gathered up McTavish's rein and put one hand to the cantle, one to the pommel of the saddle and sprang up and got his toe in the iron and was aboard.

"Here we go!" he said and grinned again and turned McTavish and was gone.

Janet said, "Oh golly! I hope it's all right this time. . . . D'you think it will be, Richard?"

He shrugged without speaking, and she looked after McTavish and saw with surprise that his pre-running stiffness seemed to have left him. He was actually trotting, with a long, free stride. She was amazed. She was going to say something to Richard about it—but he spoke before she did.

He said, "Look: I've been thinking about the Gran Premio. It's ridiculous for us to run against each other. . . ."

She stared at him in silence, and he said, "So I think I'll scratch Fitz, huh? After all, he has three more races at Ventana without the big one—and you're only figuring on Premio for McTavish. . . ."

He seemed to think he had finished, but when she still looked at him without speaking, he went on again.

"And there's another thing," he said. "The distance. Fitz is green yet—and that's a long route."

She did speak then. She said, "I hope you're convincing yourself, because you're not convincing me!" She reached out a hand as if to touch him; then pulled it back again. "Cut it out, Richard," she said. "Forget it. How d'you think Bruce would've liked it if I'd gone around sleeping with all the owners of all the horses who might beat him—just so I could persuade them to scratch?" She was surprised to find that she was feeling angry instead of grateful. She said:

"I think I'm being a heel. But don't get any more fool ideas like scratching. . . . And maybe you have something in that distance idea! I don't mean it's bad for Fitzgerald—but I know it's good for Mac!"

She didn't look at him after she'd spoken: she leaned forward in the saddle and saw that McTavish was already at the end of the ride. Murdock was turning him.

"Look!" she said. "Look! He's going to start. . . . Oh, I hope it's all right this time!"

She didn't know whether Richard spoke or not, because Murdock started just as her last word came out—and again, only this time in an agony of apprehension, she watched the dark, foreshortened shape of horse and rider come flashing toward her, and heard the thunder of the hooves, and saw the clods of brown earth like a wake behind them.

And again, this time much sooner than before, she heard Richard muttering disapproval. She couldn't catch the words, but the tone was enough.

She said, "Wait—wait!" without turning her head—and then McTavish came into the wings of the fence. He seemed to be going even faster than before—and she stopped breathing. If he didn't jump now, there'd be a terrible fall: there'd have to be—and this time it would be horse as well as rider. . . .

But he jumped—and although he seemed a little late in taking off, he jumped very big and landed running.

Her breath came out in an explosive gasp of relief, and she thrust her heels into Terrapin's brown-and-white flanks and shot out onto the ride so that she could see the second jump properly: it was a much bigger, more awkward jump than the first. If they made this all right, there couldn't be anything wrong with the combination. She was conscious of a commotion behind her as she went forward—and promptly forgot it as she pulled the pony up short and stood in her stirrups just as Mac drew near the second lot of wings—and went into them—and jumped

again, straight and true and very big. She could actually see daylight between his legs and the top of the brush. He landed running again, and after the next half-furlong she saw Murdock straighten up to stop. She giggled to herself, thinking of the fight he was going to have—and then cut herself short, hearing a confused beating of hooves behind her and a furious, very old-English oath in Richard's voice.

She suddenly felt guilty—and turned Terrapin around to see Fitzgerald, only a few yards away, towering to an unbelievable, terrifying height upon his hind legs. He was too near the perpendicular to be safe, and her heart contracted. His rein was slack and his forefeet pawed at the air with a sort of fantastic heroism. She could see every vein on his ebon belly, and the scarlet lining of his wide-spread nostrils, seen like this from below, made them seem like the dragon's whose picture in her first fairy-book had frightened her into nightmares.

"God damn you, get down!" came Richard's voice from somewhere behind the sky-reaching head. "You black abortion; get down!"

The hooves ceased pawing the air; the head tilted downwards; the dragon-nostrils disappeared; the legs came to earth—and Fitzgerald (*B. horse*—Royal Charles—Geraldine II) stood docile and beautiful—and looked enquiringly at Janet with an expression so deliberately sly that, probably as much from relief as anything else, she started to laugh.

"Damn funny!" Richard said, and she stopped laughing. "But next time we're watching a horse work, don't start that pony off as if you were breaking." He jerked his thumb at Fitzgerald. "This isn't any nine-year-old eunuch, you know."

She swallowed, and said stiffly, "Yes. I did jump out

rather quick. I'm awfully sorry, Richard. I suppose I was excited about Mac." The stiffness went out of her voice. "Did you see him? He went beautifully, didn't he? Don't you think he went well?"

He lifted his shoulders in a little shrug and looked as if he were going to speak but didn't.

"Come on," she said. "Say it! What d'you think's wrong?" She wished she didn't keep feeling angry with him.

"If you must know—Murdock. He's not right for that horse."

"Just because he shed him the first time? You know as well as I do, Richard, that nobody could've stayed on board that! But he ran all right just now, didn't he? And he jumped, didn't he?"

He looked at her and said, "Let's drop it," and then immediately added, "His stride wasn't right. And I don't like to see a good horse like that a foot over his fences. He's really one of the best brush-cutters in the business—but if he jumps that way he'll lose a length at every fence. And you ought to know it."

"But it was the first time, Richard!" After all, Mac had been too high, and she couldn't be angry. But she wanted to be. She said, "It's the first time they ever worked together. It'll be all right, I know it will. You wait. Bruce suggested Murdock—and he knew. I'm sure it'll be all right."

Richard said, "Here he is," and she turned and saw McTavish walking toward them. He was calm and quiet, but his bay coat was black with sweat. From the saddle, Murdock was grinning at her while he held up a free hand and carefully flexed its cramped fingers.

"Powerful old sonova bitch!" he said as he came close.

"Oops! Pardon the French, Miss Elliot—but it's like tryin' to stop a tank." He pulled Mac up beside her. "How'd he go?"

She smiled at both of them. "Swell!" she said. "I thought he was maybe a little high over his fences. . . ."

"Yeah," said Murdock quickly. "I got that. We'll fix it, though."

She felt much better. "I'm sure you will, Mr. Murdock," she said and then rode beside him as they went back toward the rock and home, Sherry again hanging onto her stirrup-leather.

Richard didn't come with them: he had to work Fitzgerald. She was pleased, partly because she could talk to Murdock alone, without being overpowered by a sense of her own amateurish inadequacy as a trainer—and more, perhaps, because she now had a chance to master that ridiculous sense of irritation, that sense of being perpetually upon the edge of losing her temper, which had possessed her all the morning.

Murdock had gone and Mac was bathed and cooled out and put away when Richard rode in on a Fitzgerald just hot enough to need washing. She smiled at him and helped him unsaddle and then took him aside when Sherry had the stallion on the washrack and was starting his bath.

She said, "I'm afraid I've been awfully bitchy this morning. I'm sorry, darling. But I feel all right now. I don't quite know what was the matter with me." She knew she was talking very fast, and perhaps a little incoherently, but it didn't seem to matter.

"I fixed everything with George Murdock," she said. "You know, he's an awfully nice little man, really. And I'm sure Mac'll jump right for him after two or three works—he knew it was wrong; Murdock knew, I mean. Oh, and he even remembered something about Mac that nobody



will ever believe until they know—that he *doesn't* need a race before the one he has to win . . . what do they always call that? . . . a 'sharpener,' isn't it? He remembered Bruce telling him Mac was better without sharpeners. And he thought Mac was running well this morning. He said he got a wonderful feel off him—and he said he was the strongest horse he'd ever been on. Oh, yes—and he said he honestly thought we had a very good chance; Fitzgerald was all he was afraid of, and the distance was all in Mac's favor. He's coming up Mondays and Tuesdays to work Mac—and three times the week before the Premio. D'you think that's all right—it seemed right to me?"

She ran out of breath and stopped. Richard smiled at her, but he didn't speak and she thought of something else. She said:

"And it's awfully lucky it's the Premio Mac's running in and not something later, because that's the last race Murdock'll be riding in. He's going to enlist after that, he told me. I think that's why I made it fifteen per cent of the purse instead of ten."

She stopped again. Richard didn't speak, and she slipped her arm through his and squeezed a little.

"That's all," she said. "I just thought I'd report. Any criticisms?"

He smiled at her again, shaking his head. "It's your horse, honey."

She took the arm away. "Say it," she said. "I think I know what it is—but say it!"

He said, "For the last time—that's not the right man for that horse!" But he didn't leave it there. He said, "The fact that he's going to be a Khaki-Clad Defender of Democracy doesn't make the slightest difference. . . ."

*The time when the thunderstorm raged for three hours*

all over the valley and its surrounding hills. She had never heard thunder in California before; she didn't know it ever came there.

But apparently it did, for this was the real thing. The rain flooded down in ghost-grey sheets blown to tatters by the wind which howled around every corner of the hills. The thunder rolled and crashed and sometimes cracked immediately overhead like an angry Olympian whip. The flickering unsteady flares of sheet-lightning were interspersed with vivid, saw-edged streaks of bright fire which ripped the sulky black of the sky.

It began without warning, and at night—when she and Richard and Mr. Fowler were at dinner in her little house. It was the first time she had persuaded the old man that he must dine with her for a change. It was a good dinner: the bulk of it was brought up from the Inn, but there was a special salad which she made herself and there were Crêpes Suzette—very good ones—which Richard concocted. An enormous fire flamed and crackled and sent wavering light over the newly painted walls and struck warm red reflections from the wood of beams and furniture.

The first peal of thunder was loud and close and rattled the big window in its frame. She was pouring coffee when it came, and it startled her so that she spilled a great splash on the cloth.

"Here we go!" said Mr. Fowler—and Richard stood up and without saying anything turned off all the lights and pulled back the curtains from the big window and they sat in silence and drank their coffee and stared through the glass at the ever-changing pageant of the rain, and the tossing trees, and the dark, swelling hills, alternately hidden and revealed by long pauses of utter, wind-filled darkness

and breath-taking instants of that blinding yet revealing clarity which only lightning can give.

And then, after a time which might have been minutes or hours, Richard broke the spell. He had better take a look at the horses, he said, and found himself a slicker and his hat and disappeared, while she suggested to Mr. Fowler a move from the table to more comfortable seats and settled him on the sofa by the fire and quickly cleared dishes and debris from the table and then sat herself in a chair opposite him. The fire was hot upon her face and the rain drummed savagely upon the shingled roof. She felt warm and safe and well-fed—and then acutely, bitterly, personally sorry for people who weren't. She wished the big window were here, at this end of the room, so that she could sit just where she was and still look out of it; then, for some obscure reason, was glad that it wasn't.

She said, suddenly, "It's wonderful in here. Dry and warm and comfortable—and . . . and friendly."

"There's nothin' like rain on the roof," said Mr. Fowler.

She threw her cigarette into the red heart of the fire and stared after it.

"I love this house," she said. "It's everything I wanted, just where I wanted it. I loved it even before you were so sweet and had it fixed up so beautifully. And now . . . ." She let the sentence trail off into silence and looked at the old man and smiled.

But he wasn't smiling. He was regarding her steadily, and for the second time since she had known him she found something . . . she searched her mind for the right word . . . something *alarming* in his face.

"Yeah—it's snug enough." He spoke slowly, and without a glance around him at the snugness. "And it's way out of the world, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes." Although she didn't look at him she knew the bright, steady eyes were still upon her face.

He said, "I been thinkin' about you lately. I been wonderin' if it's too far out for you—maybe."

She had to look at him now. She was frightened. She said, "What do you mean—exactly?" and hoped he wouldn't answer; then was contradictorily disappointed when she heard Richard's step upon the porch and he didn't speak.

There was a vivid flash of lightning as the door opened; then a tremendous clap of thunder as it closed and Richard was in the room.

"Enter Mephistol!" she said—and laughed and felt immediately better and glad the talk with the old man was over. She jumped up and helped Richard off with his coat and bustled around and got drinks and served them and even induced Mr. Fowler to light a cigar.

And then there was nothing left to do—but it didn't matter. She stood with her back to the fire and watched the two men. Richard's dark head was tilted back against his chair and he was staring into the fire with eyes which she couldn't see. She wondered what his thoughts were—and then looked at Mr. Fowler. He too was gazing into the fire. She could see his eyes, but they told her nothing.

She said, "I always worry about wild animals and birds and things in weather like this . . . especially when I'm not out in it."

"They manage." Richard turned his head on the chair-back. "They have their methods."

She moved away from the fire and wandered toward the big window. "But on a night like this," she said, "some of them must be in trouble."

No one answered her and she went close to the window and peered out, trying to see through the thick grey chif-

fon mist of the rain and the blackness beyond it. Then sheet-lightning quivered over the dark arch of the sky and she was looking down into the little amphitheater: it seemed as if she were seeing, in one breathless flash of time, every leaf and shrub and blade of grass, every grain of soil even, which made up the whole miniature, unlikely beauty of the place.

She said suddenly, "Do you know, the first time I looked out of this window I saw a deer and a bobcat walk across that little knoll down there and, believe it or not, they went down to the stream and drank together!" She had been thinking about it, but she hadn't meant to say it. She turned around to face the men.

"That was the night I came," she said. "I was horribly tired and hopeless and lost, and seeing them did something for me. It made me see that nothing's impossible." She went back and stood in front of the fire and looked down at Richard.

He smiled up at her. "You and Chesterton, huh?"

"Chesterton? . . . Oh, something about miracles, d'you mean?"

"Mm-hum! 'The most wonderful thing about miracles is that they *sometimes* happen.' Italics mine."

She made a face at him. "Meaning you don't believe me?"

"Meaning you must have been very tired."

Mr. Fowler cut in suddenly. "I believe you," he said to her. "I'd believe you if you told me black was white." He was completely serious. "There's some people you have to believe!"

She turned to him and said, "Thank you very much." She felt warm all through.

*The time when Mr. Fowler made the great Presentation,*

to Sherlock Robinson in particular and the Stable in general. The Present itself was in the middle of the yard that morning. Sherry was holding it, and Richard was standing near him, reading the note which had come with it. Sherry's face was something to see: it was grey-pale beneath the chocolate skin, and his eyes were wide and shining with tears which, because of the light behind them, had to be of bliss. He didn't even hear her approach, and when she spoke to him he started.

She said, "What's this, Sherry?" and looked at the Present.

He opened his mouth and his lips moved, but only a strange little squeak came from between them. She looked at his face again and forgot the chill of the grey morning and the bite of the wind.

Richard said, "Here," and handed her the note. It was neatly typewritten on the Inn paper and signed "George B. Fowler" in an unexpectedly fine script. It ran:

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN—**

*This is to certify that the pony "Terrapin," delivered herewith, has now been transferred to the ownership of Sherlock Robinson—*

**PROVIDED THAT—**

*Said Sherlock Robinson allows the pony to be used as "lead-pony" for the present Stable, under the direction of (and subject to orders by) Miss J. Elliot and/or Mr. R. Olivant.*

**AND PROVIDED THAT—**

*Said "Terrapin" reverts absolutely to said S. Robinson's charge and orders upon any move or dissolution of said Stable.*

*By Order.*

*George B. Fowler*

*P. S. Said pony is seven years old, and guaranteed sound.*

*Said pony knows his work, having been "lead-pony" to the Trevine Racing Stable for three years.*

She finished reading and folded the note carefully back into its original creases and handed it to Sherry. She said:

"Well, Sherry—what d'you know!" and picked up his hand and shook it while Richard clapped him on the shoulder and began to walk around the pony. He was a pinto, with more than a touch of class and a wise, pretty head on a handsome body.

And his manners were as good as his looks. They put a saddle and bridle on him and made Sherry bring him with them when they took Mac and Fitzgerald down into the valley. The boy, still speechless, was in some ninth heaven of delight, and Terrapin carried him with quiet, alert efficiency, showing a soundly common-sense preference for Mac's proximity rather than the stallion's.

They had rounded the big rock and were onto the ride, and Richard had taken Fitzgerald on ahead, before any word came from Sherry's mouth. He was riding side by side with her and she was still counteracting the greyness of the morning and the coldness of the wind by studying the raptness of his face.

She said, "You look all right on a horse, Sherry. You must have ridden a lot when you were small." But he didn't answer her. He hadn't heard her.

He said, "How come He knew?" with a very big H for the pronoun. And then, "Gosh! I shoulda gone right quick to tell him thank you!" He turned wide dark eyes upon her.

She repressed a smile. "He'll understand. He'll wait until you get back, Sherry."

She stopped there, because she didn't want to say too

much, but after a moment she couldn't resist an addition. She said:

"Mr. Fowler's a wonderful person, isn't he?"

Again the wide eyes were turned upon her—with something in them which made her feel small but quite happy to be small.

"'Wonderful's' not a good enough word, Miss," said Sherlock Robinson.

And then she saw that Richard had turned and was coming back to them at a slow, controlled gallop. He was up in his stirrups, but his hold was short and he had locked his wrists on the stallion's crest so that the great black neck was curved in a short sweeping arc of beauty so powerful that it hovered on the borderline of ugliness. The dark, snowy-bandaged legs rose and fell in a rigid, intricate pattern of restrained movement. The short, unbraided mane blew stiffly upward in a shimmering frieze. In the cold grey air the blackness of the great body was a sharp shock to the eye, like a flash of bright color against the sun. The sound of the hooves came in a slow unchanging rhythm, growing louder and louder in her ears.

She thought, "Isn't he *beautiful*!" and didn't know she had said the words until Sherry answered them.

"Sure is han'some, Miss," said Sherry—and then looked quickly back at the horse who walked beside him, sulky this morning because he had to walk and not work.

"But he's still the one for me, Miss," said Sherry—and Janet wanted to pat him.

Then Richard was with her again. He sent Sherry on ahead, knowing that the boy by this time was enough in touch with reality to want to try his horse by himself.

She looked up at the sky, suddenly conscious that the light had changed. Under the low arch of steel-grey there



were now great black masses of cloud. They seemed to be coming, unreasonably, into each end of the valley and be moving toward each other. They were low: it looked as if they were lower than the tops of the hills. In the brooding light which filtered through them, the green of the willows and the brown earth of the ride, and all the other bright warm colors of the valley, were transformed to darker, different shades. And the cold wind still blew, cutting through the wool of her clothes until it burned icily against her skin.

She said happily, "Isn't it foul this morning?" and Richard looked at her with a smile.

"Going to be fouler, too," he said. "I'm glad you're so pleased about it."

She laughed. "I suppose it's Sherry. But I feel wonderful."

"Feel pretty blithe myself," he said. "Or I will in a minute." He suddenly pulled into the edge of the willow-fringe and stopped Fitzgerald and threw a leg over his withers and slid to the ground. "Hold him just a second, will you?" He pulled the rein over the stallion's head and gave it to her and then disappeared with a crackling of branches.

Fitzgerald stood quietly, at the full length of the rein. He stared at McTavish and then reached out his head, his lips rolled playfully back from the white teeth beneath them.

"No!" she said. "No, Fitz!" McTavish merely grunted and moved his head out of reach.

With a little scuttering sound an enormous jack-rabbit broke out from the tangled rushes on the river-bank and shot by Fitzgerald's feet in a dun-colored streak. There was a snort of histrionic alarm, and a violent tugging at the hand which held his rein, and a fussy stamping of hooves,

and a suddenly new and frightening view of Fitz upon two legs. Beneath her, McTavish twitched once, but then stood rock-still.

Fitzgerald came down to the horizontal, but immediately began to back up, pulling at the rein, and she didn't like the look in his eye. He was having a fine time for himself—and she was terrified that he might break away altogether and run free and do himself damage; damage which would be her fault for having let him go.

"Fitz!" she said desperately. "Quit it, Fitz!" She wanted to shout for Richard but was afraid to give the stallion any further excuse for cutting up. He stood still at last—but the rein, and her arm, were stretched out tightly to their full length.

She eased Mac nearer, to lessen the strain, and then—just as she was beginning to breathe more easily—disaster came.

A little wicked squeal broke from the stallion's throat, and he backed sharply, throwing his weight onto his quarters and flinging up his head. The rein tore fiercely through her hand and was gone.

Free, Fitzgerald threw his head again, cracked his nostrils—and began to trot, the rein dangling dangerously near his forefeet, out from the willows and onto the ride.

She froze, knowing that pursuit would only accelerate a dash for freedom. She tried to call out for Richard, but her mouth was dry and her tongue wouldn't work.

And then, right upon the edge of the smooth, far-stretching ride, Fitzgerald stopped abruptly. He seemed to be looking at something near him; something in the willow trees. Whatever it was, he wasn't frightened by it. He was deeply interested and attentive.

Something, which couldn't be Richard, came out of the

willows and went to the stallion's head: it was hidden from her by the great black body, but it picked up the rein while the horse stood utterly docile. And then it turned the horse—and she saw the grey mane and lean brown body of the hermit whom Abel Craddock called the Possell.

She stared wide-eyed and didn't move. She was amazed by Fitzgerald's docility: the man didn't speak to him nor touch him but turned him about by the rein until he stood facing her. The stallion's head was still bent toward this strange being who had captured him.

She saw now that McTavish, too, was completely and placidly interested in the odd, almost naked figure: McTavish's ears were pricked well forward and his head thrust out toward it. But he didn't move. And Fitzgerald didn't move. Neither did she—nor the Possell. They were all motionless—and they made no sound. She had a peculiar feeling that time itself had been stopped; as if everything in the world were part of some tremendous moving-picture and the Operator had suddenly halted the film.

Then she heard a movement near her and saw that Richard was back. He was walking slowly toward his horse and the man who held it. She thought: I wonder if he'll get him to speak *this* time?—and hoped very much that he would.

Except for Richard's footsteps there was still no sound. Then there was a very faint rustling in the reeds, and she caught a glimpse of the Hermit's dog, gaunt and lean and gray like his master. He disappeared again at once—and then Richard was up to Fitzgerald and had taken the rein.

She tried not to breathe. The scrawny figure shrank back—but it held its ground. She wondered fleetingly what it must feel like to be naked against this wind—and then heard Richard's voice, very quiet and very calm.

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you very much."

He stood with his hand on the stallion's neck—and the wild figure, although it still seemed to be shrinking away, stayed to face him.

She held her breath. Richard, never making any sudden movement, found a cigarette and lighted it. He said:

"I'm glad he didn't get away. Might've hurt himself. . . . I'm very grateful to you."

The half-naked figure straightened. It wasn't shrinking back any more. The small bright eyes were fixed not on Richard's face, but upon the stallion. She was sure he was going to speak: she knew he was going to speak. . . .

And then, breaking the silence, came a faraway sound, growing nearer with every beat, of galloping hooves—and a piercing, yodelling cry which must be from the throat of an ecstatic Sherry.

The Hermit vanished. He had been there—he wasn't there. The willow branches swayed; then closed. He wasn't there.

"*Damn!*" said Richard. "Hell and infinity! I thought I had him." He scowled bleakly for an instant; then turned to her and grinned.

"Never mind," he said. "Next time'll do it." He threw the rein back over Fitzgerald's head and mounted and looked up at the sky. "If we don't watch it, we're going to get wet."

But they didn't. The black masses of cloud piled into the valley and over the hill-tops in ever-increasing numbers: they joined each other and fused and became a solid, lowering black canopy. But it didn't start to rain until they had reached home and done the horses and put them away.

She had closed Mac's door and stepped out into the

yard. There were a few heavy, scattered drops—and then a deluge. The force and volume of it took her by surprise, and she scurried for the first refuge she could see—the open door to Fitzgerald's box.

Richard was buckling Fitz's blanket. He looked up at her, smiling, as she burst in. She shook the rain from her hair and smiled back. She liked the storm, and she loved him. She felt wonderful.

From the stall door the rain looked like a grey film joining the low sky with the earth. It bounced off the gravel of the yard and played a drum-roll on the roof. The morning grew suddenly and perceptibly warmer, and a lush heavy scent from the hillside hung in the streaming air.

Richard brushed past her and went through the door and ran with lowered head to the tackroom and came back in a moment with a slicker. He put it around her—and then left his arms where they were and pulled her back against him and kissed the side of her neck, just below her ear.

The most extraordinary thrill ran through her. It left her with a lump in her throat and a mistiness before her eyes.

She turned in his arms so that she faced him. She put her arms about him and held him close. She said:

"Oh, Richard—I do love you so!" and waited for him to speak, but for once didn't mind when, instead of the words she wanted, he lowered his head and kissed her mouth.

The lump in her throat grew larger, and the mistiness in her eyes became frank and definite tears. And she felt actively, acutely happy. When he raised his head she laid hers on his shoulder. She didn't want to speak or move or

do anything except stay where she was and feel as she now felt.

He said, "You *satisfactory* woman!" with a little half-smile. They were almost the very words she'd expected, but she hadn't—she most definitely hadn't—expected the huskiness of the voice which said them.

She leaned back in his arms and looked up into his face. She said, "Why, Richard . . ." and then was forced to stop, and even stand away from him, as the sound of Sherry's running footsteps came through the noise of the rain, and Sherry's head, shrouded in a piece of sacking and reminding her vaguely of witch-doctors, flashed by the door.

She thought. *Damn! Oh, damn oh damn!*—and missed the first words of what Richard was saying.

". . . do us good," she heard. "You beat it back and change quickly. I'll be up for you in twenty minutes." He was looking at his watch. "We can be half-way to anywhere by noon."

She didn't want to say she hadn't heard the beginning. She said, feeling very clever, "You mean we'll just go out on a . . . a . . ." She couldn't find the right word and finished lamely with: "a holiday?"

"Jaunt. Tear. Aimless trip. Call it what you like." He laughed at her. "When you don't catch what people say, just own up."

"Aimless Adventure," she said firmly. "Get me a sack like Sherry's for my head and I'll be ready before you are."

And she was. She'd put on a gay red turban which was a challenge to the weather, and her raincoat and bag were ready upon a chair by the door and she was pouring two glasses of sherry when she heard the car drive up, and then his running feet upon the path. She held a glass out to

him as he took off his hat, dripping just from the short run.

She said, "A glass of wine with you, sir," and looked at him as he took the drink from her hand. Beneath the open raincoat she could see a tweed suit which she didn't remember. She said, "You look very smart—I shall be very proud of you," and lifted her own glass and drank to him. She couldn't understand what had made her feel like this—so tingling with happiness and anticipation. And all just because he had suggested they should drive away from here, for an hour or two or three, through all this exaggerated rain, and give themselves a holiday in the great outer world—a jaunt, a tear, an Aimless Adventure.

"You too," he said. "You know, it's extremely satisfying to know that wherever one goes there can't be a more beautiful woman than one's partner."

That lasted her for nine miles and fifteen minutes—and they were on a wide highway which she knew before she really said anything again. She said:

"I like this! . . . I like you, too!" and squeezed his hand and looked at the water-blurred, steam-hazed wind-screen and was delighted that she couldn't see anything properly.

She said, "Where're we going?" and then, "San Pietro, I suppose?"

"Eventually," he said. "Or maybe not," and a few miles further on suddenly swung the car off the streaming grey-ness of the highway onto a side road which she would have sworn had not been there before today and which led, very windingly, up into the hills to the east of San Pietro.

The rain seemed even heavier up here. She couldn't see anything at all now, and Richard was gripping the wheel more tightly than usual and leaning forward over it. His

eyes were wrinkled at the corners as he strove to see, and the speedometer needle dropped to somewhere around twenty.

They came to the top of a hill and turned and began to run more easily down. The rain seemed to be less ferocious now, and Richard wiped the inside of his half of the wind-screen and didn't have to lean forward any more. She put her hand upon his fingers as they rested on the smooth blackness of the wheel. She was happy in the steamy, sheltered moving box of her world.

They came to the foot of the hill, and he stopped the car. She saw the looming indistinctness of a low building through the misted glass.

"Where's this?" she said, and then looked full at him as he turned toward her.

She didn't wait for him to answer. She was overwhelmed by a warm rushing wave of simple uncomplicated comradeship.

"Hello, my friend!" she said, and took hold of his arm and squeezed it.

He sat very still and looked at her. He wasn't smiling or stern or sardonic—and she had a weird, ridiculous idea that she didn't know this man at all.

He said, "Hello yourself!" and then, sharply, "Why did you say that?"

"I don't know." She smiled at him and lifted her shoulders. "You are, aren't you?"

"I am what?"

"My friend, of course."

"Chapter Ten," he said. "Janet Learns About Life." But he smiled when he said it; a smile which made her toes and fingers warm and carried her out of the car and through five yards of rain and into a warm, most comfortingly ugly



place where there was a bar, and a huge fire which crackled, and a Dalmatian lying in front of the fire, and a fat red happy man who looked like a Landlord and was.

There was also a mina bird in an enormous cage, and a thin, sharp-nosed Frenchwoman who turned out to be the fat Landlord's wife and somehow managed to be nice to look at.

They were delighted to see Richard, and made a great fuss over him. He introduced them and the man beamed at her and the woman's small bright eyes flickered over her in one comprehensive sweep before the mouth beneath the nose broke into a kind and friendly smile.

There was some sherry then—the best sherry she'd ever tasted. The red man went on beaming at her while his wife and Richard poured voluble French on each other much too fast for her to follow. The Dalmatian got up and stretched voluptuously; then flattered her by leaning against her knee and offering his head to be scratched. The mina bird regarded them all solemnly and suddenly said, "Hell! Where is everybody?"

And then, after five minutes or an hour, the woman disappeared and the man set a little table by the fire with a checkered cloth and knives and forks and wine glasses. While he did this, Richard muttered something and went out of the room. She thought she heard him telephoning, but wasn't sure. She sat and sipped at the sherry—her glass seemed to keep refilling itself like Fortunatus' purse—and played with the Dalmatian's ears and listened to the drum of the rain and the lusty crackling of the fire. Sometimes she looked into the fire and sometimes up to smile at the Landlord.

Richard came back, and moved her over to the little table and sat down opposite her. Then the Frenchwoman

brought the omelettes, and a long hot crunchy loaf of bread and some fascinatingly-patterned squares of butter which had never been near any salt. And her husband filled their glasses from a dark bottle which he carried as if it were a baby.

She tasted the omelette and lifted her eyebrows at Richard and said, "Oh!" She tasted the wine and said "Oh!" again. She broke off a jagged, gloriously untidy end of the long loaf and put one of the patterned squares of butter on it and watched it melt on the whiteness to a darker gold. She opened her mouth to speak, but Richard stopped her.

"Eat," he said. "Tell me afterwards."

She obeyed. In fact, she didn't tell him until they were in the car again and rolling downhill through rain which didn't seem to have slackened at all. He smiled at her when she'd finished telling him. He said:

"Thought you'd like it. You mentioned omelettes the other day, so I thought you ought to taste Clymène's. There may be someone else in America who can do them. . . ."

"No," she said firmly. "No. There isn't." She said, "Who is she, Richard? Who are they? What's the place? How did you come to know them? She seemed to know you very well. I tried to follow the French, but it was too fast for me. Was she calling you 'mon Capitaine' or was I dreaming? It seemed to me you'd known them both for years—or am I wrong?"

"Whoa!" he said. "Whoa! Their name's Ryder. He met her in France in '18, and went back afterwards and married her. I was once billeted in her father's house in Morency. Ryder owns that property and Clymène's a good

cook so they thought they'd run a hostelry. They do and it almost pays."

"And was she saying 'mon Capitaine'?"

He nodded. "I think she did once or twice."

"That doesn't sound right, somehow—not for the Lafayette Escadrille."

"It isn't. This was afterwards. I have served, Madam, beneath the Stars and Stripes as well as the Tricolor."

"Richard," she said, "what's it like to be a soldier? I mean, did you like it?"

"Yes and no—mainly no." His tone was shorter even than the words.

She glanced at his face. It looked hard and set, and the eyes were wrinkled at the corners again as he peered through the clouded screen. She said:

"Do you ever feel you'd like to be a soldier again? I mean, suppose we do get really mixed up in this . . ."

He didn't let her finish. He said savagely, "Good God, no!" and then was silent.

She was silent too. They were still going downhill—and presently, after a stop and a turn, they were on the wide San Pietro highway once more. She sat placidly, staring at the misted glass in front of her. She wondered why she still felt so happy; why she didn't worry about having made a mistake. The magic of today, whatever kind it was, was apparently potent enough even for this.

When they drove into the outskirts of San Pietro it was nearly one o'clock. The rain was still coming down, but more rationally now. The sprawling town was grey and shining with water, and the sea in the harbor was almost gunmetal-colored, blending with the tint of the warships which floated on it until it was difficult to see them. Because of the weather, or the time, or something she

wouldn't know about, the town seemed less overcrowded, less hive-like, than the last time she'd seen it: there were still trucks on all the roads, but not so many of them and not traveling so fast; there were still uniforms on all the sidewalks, but again not so many and in some way not so disturbing. The town was still full to overflowing, but there didn't seem so much discomfort in the fullness.

She wondered idly what they were going to do with themselves—and then was surprised when she found that Richard had stopped the car, neatly parking outside a big building she couldn't recognize through the misted windows but which turned out to be the St. Carlos Hotel, seen from the side. They went in, and Richard took her arm and steered through a maze of passages to the lobby and the bright little Spanish bar just beyond it. She felt warmer and happier than ever, and she could feel the touch of his fingers around her elbow long after they'd left it.

She didn't know what she wanted to drink, and he went to the bar himself and brought her back a strange Dutch liqueur with a dark golden color and a name she couldn't pronounce. It tasted vaguely of apricots and was delicious. She sipped it in great contentment while Richard, mumbling something about being back in a minute, left her at the table in the corner alcove. She watched his back as he crossed the lobby and disappeared; it was a straight, graceful, wide-shouldered back, and it had that peculiar quality of elegance in movement which she had so often noticed throughout her life in the backs of horsemen. It was a beautiful back—and she was very proud of it. It was Richard's back—and she loved it.

And she loved Richard. She loved him . . . *terribly*. That was the easy word, the word everybody used—but it seemed the right word, too.

She grew brave, she was so happy. She opened the little black door at the back of her mind and let out the question which had been sternly locked behind it for so long; not only let it out, but allowed it to frisk and gambol around her mind and hatch little eggs which immediately turned into other questions, each as big and important and sharp-edged as its parent. Did Richard love her? . . . If someone insisted that friendship and sex, in varying proportions, made the sum total of relationship between a man and a woman, was that just another way of saying what most people meant by "love"? . . . Or did it mean that someone couldn't feel what most people meant by "love"? . . . What was going to happen to her and Richard? . . . Whose fault—or the reverse—was it that they'd never quarreled? . . . Could she ever feel as deeply, as completely, about any other human as she felt about and with and for Richard? . . . Why was it that, until this moment, she had been afraid, ever since she had met him, even to acknowledge the existence of Future? . . . Was it because she really knew the answer—or because she was too timid to look happiness in the face? . . . Why did he persist in this attitude of serene, observatory aloofness from the world? . . . Did he really like to watch it as you'd watch an ant-castle—or was he afraid to be mixed up in it? . . . Why, when she so passionately wanted a child by him, was she frightened either to tell him or to take matters into her own hands? . . . Why wouldn't he ever just say "I love you"? . . .

He came back and sat down beside her—and of their own accord the questions scurried back through the black door and slammed it behind them.

She said, happily, "Just in time, my friend."

He looked at her intently. "Why? Anything wrong?"

"I was thinking too much," she said.

He didn't answer that. He said, abruptly, "Look—I think I've made a damn-fool mistake. But I'm not sure. . . ."

"I thought Olivants never made mistakes—any more than they forgot anything." She was laughing at him—but she was very curious. She'd never seen him like this: he seemed . . . uncertain.

He took a small envelope out of his pocket and laid it on the table. He stared at it for a moment—and then pulled out of it two pieces of yellow pasteboard which looked like theater tickets. He said:

"You'll have to tell me—you're reasonably honest. . . . These are for a concert. This afternoon. San Esteban Symphony Orchestra, with Marini conducting. And the Dane they say's a great pianist—Ludstrom."

She looked at him in silence. She felt—strange. She said at last, "Oh, Richard!" and didn't know whether she was suddenly miserable or even happier than she had been.

She said, "Why . . . what . . . how did you come to think . . ." and then let the speech trail off into untidy silence.

"Christ Almighty, woman!" He was explosive: he sounded angry. "Music must've been a very large percentage of your life—particularly piano music. And you've been leading an existence in which there isn't any music at all. And you never talk about it. You never . . ." He checked abruptly. "Either you'd like to go, or you'd hate it. Just say which. There's nothing complex about it, for Christ's sake!"

She kept silent, staring at him: she knew what she was feeling now.

He said, almost gently, "I was only shouting because I'd realized that I shouldn't have been so clever. I should've known that if you needed music, you'd do something about

it yourself. In other words, I should've minded my own business."

"It is yours, darling." There was a funny lump in her throat which made it difficult to talk. "And bless you for minding it." She didn't in the least know whether or not she wanted to hear music. She didn't care. She only knew that he'd been thinking about her and her welfare: if the concert-hall had been Torquemada's pet dungeon, she would have hurried there singing. She said:

"What time does it start? Don't let's be late. Where is it?"—and after some obscure intervals of time and distance found herself seated, with Richard beside her, in a box in that hideous pride of San Pietro, the Civic Auditorium.

And she lost herself for nearly two hours, immersed in a rainbow sea of sensation which stripped her of all consciousness of self. Whether it was pleasure or pain, or equally compound of both, she didn't know. It was sensation—the deep, psyche-sensation which only music could give her and never before had given her to this extent. Somewhere in her mind, as she discovered afterward, she was aware of facts—the orchestra was good if not great; the pianist, whom she had never heard before, was a gift from God; the program was balanced and well-chosen; the acoustics were marvellous. . . . But she wasn't conscious of knowing or thinking anything. She felt—that was all.

Then it was over, and she was back with Richard. She slipped her hand through his arm as they went down the wide staircase to the foyer. She squeezed the arm and felt an answering pressure. She wondered numbly whether she was still as happy as she had been throughout the wonderful morning. She wasn't sure.

She said suddenly, "Let's go and have a drink," and then had to break off because of the woman.

She was a tall, grey-haired, handsome woman, beautifully dressed. She stood in their way, diffident but implacable. She didn't give Richard a single glance.

"Please excuse me," she said. "But you are Janet Elliot, aren't you? I've heard you play so many times. . . ."

Janet Elliot said yes, she was—and worked hard at being polite while Richard treacherously slipped away, first to stare at a placard on the wall, then for some reason to the box-office.

When he came back, Janet Elliot had been forced into explaining about the injury to her hand. She said brightly:

"Yes, it was rather bad luck, wasn't it," and some more words which somehow took her gracefully away. . . .

She really needed the drink now—and they went back to the St. Carlos and had two quickly. They didn't talk at all, until Richard said, "Damn that old bag! . . . What about dinner? Where? Or back home?"

She smiled at him. "Home, don't you think? It's silly, but I feel horribly tired."

They had a third drink, which she probably shouldn't have taken, and then found the car again and drove off through dark blue dusk which quickly became darkness.

It seemed an awfully long way. And Richard, intent upon the road, was very far off. She shrank back in the seat and was still. She felt as if she were much too small inside her shell; a little dried pea-like thing rattling about in a pod much too big for it. She was utterly astonished—and afterward mortally ashamed—when a small, chokey sob tore its ugly way from her throat.

Richard looked at her quickly. He pulled in to the side



of the road and stopped the car and switched off the engine.

"Want to tell me?" he said, and put an arm around her shoulders.

She didn't move. She said, "It's qu-quite ridiculous—b-but my hand hurts."

*The time when they were walking the horses along the dirt road where she had encountered the cavalry, and met the whole Craddock family, looking unbelievably different yet inescapably the same in their town-going clothes.*

Abel stopped the chugging Ford when he saw them. His dark tight suit and stiff collar didn't make him look any less square, and Minnie, in a new blue smock, seemed completely cylindrical. The two children, rigid and prim and well-soaped, sat in the back seat, and reminded Janet of pleased but self-conscious mice: they were so like something out of *The Wind in the Willows* that she wouldn't have been in the least surprised to see Mole or Rat—or even old Badger—come sauntering out from the trees.

The horses stood quietly enough beside the car and Richard raised a hand in salute and she said, "Hello," and smiled down at everybody.

"Going to town?" said Richard.

Abel set the cap he had lifted back upon his head. "Doctor," he said and made a gesture toward his wife.

"Oh!" Janet looked at her questioningly. "Is it time?"

Minnie shook her head placidly and Abel said, "Check-up. Three weeks. Eh, Min?" He turned to her for confirmation and she nodded and directed her happy, semi-circular smile at Janet.

Abel was studying the horses now. "Look fine!" he said—and then, garrulously, "The both."

Richard grinned. "Best in the West," he said improbably—and Janet felt a sudden, devastating wave of tenderness for him. There was a silly lump in her throat—and she was glad when Abel Craddock said, "Gotta be goin'," and put the car in gear and lifted his cap again and drove away, with Minnie and the field mice waving as they went.

They walked the horses on again, and Fitzgerald began to cut up a little. McTavish looked at him sideways and grunted—and Richard laughed.

But Janet didn't laugh. She was still looking after the car, even though it was out of sight around a bend in the road.

She said, "I think Minnie's wonderful!"

"Why? Because she's pregnant?" She could feel him looking at her.

"No! . . . well maybe—a little." She felt a vague annoyance, though whether with him or with herself she didn't know. "No. I think what I really mean is that she's so wonderful *about* it. So happy—and placid—and . . . and right."

"Part of her job," Richard said. "And she does it well."

She let it go: it was one of the times when she didn't know whether he was teasing her or not. But she went on thinking about Minnie and there was a long silence while they rode on, McTavish walking with his long, swinging, rather awkward stride, Fitzgerald, who hated any non-galloping day, causing quite a little trouble before he settled down.

The sun was hot on her back as they climbed up a track which wound steeply over the shoulder of one of the hills. They hadn't spoken for a long time—but she was still thinking of Minnie and what Minnie stood for.

She said, suddenly, "Richard—have you any children?"

and found time for a fleeting sensation of wonder over how little she knew about him. How very much, and how very, very little.

He said, gravely, "I don't think so," and then, "Have you?"

She looked at him quickly. "No," she said. "And I'm sure." She laughed, but it was surface laughter—and in a little while she tried again.

She said, "It must be awfully exciting to have a baby!"

"Damned uncomfortable, too." There was that edge to his tone which sometimes would fill her with unreasoning anger. It did now, but she was silent. Perhaps, if he let the subject drop, she'd get over it quickly: she nearly always did.

But he said, "It's also an incredibly messy process. And very untidy."

They were at the top of the hill now, and she pulled Mac up abruptly. She said:

"Why do you always do that?"

"Do what?" He slapped Fitzgerald on the neck to make him stand still.

"Deliberately talk things down . . . knock everything that's—that's beautiful about life!"

"I don't," he said. "You should know that by this time." He smiled at her—and she almost felt she hated him.

"I . . ." she began; then stopped abruptly. She was trembling. She said, "Oh, I don't mean the things you think are beautiful—either of them."

He was looking at her hard. "Are there two?" he said. "Besides you, I mean."

She ignored that and swept on. "Yes. And only two—as far as I can discover. Sex and horses. But there are other

beautiful things in life. Quite a few of them, as a matter of fact!"

"Just fancy!" he said—and then Fitzgerald began to cut up and she found they were walking on again, across the little plateau toward the other side of the hill.

But she couldn't stop. "I know what it is," she said. "You know so damn much you can't feel anything!"

She liked that. She was pleased with that. It was true, and it might have hurt. She wished she wasn't shaking. She knew she was breathing too hard and tried to restrain herself.

He said mildly. "And possibly you feel so excessively that there's no room in you for knowledge."

She flared. "I don't think I want any of what you call knowledge. Not if it means that everything I've always thought . . . thought beautiful is really ugly and contemptible!"

"That's pretty silly talk, Janet." His voice was infuriatingly calm. "But fortunately you know it."

"No, I don't! You've forgotten I don't know anything, haven't you? There's no room in me for any knowledge—remember?"

She didn't look at him: she stared straight ahead of her and saw nothing. She heard him sigh—and for some reason the sound lashed her into speech again.

She said, "The trouble with you is that you ought to have been a gossip columnist—only you had the wrong sort of education and began to study Man with a great big M instead of men with a little one! So you got all mixed up—and now you behave like a sort of Olympian Walter Winchell, trying so hard to debunk *all* the bunk that you overreach yourself pretty badly most of the time!"

That was good. It felt good coming out. But it wasn't

so good when he laughed. He didn't say anything. He only laughed.

They were going down the hill now, and the trail was steep and narrow and he pulled Fitzgerald in behind her and Mac and they went on in silence.

She began to feel different. She wasn't angry any more: she was a little ashamed of herself. But she wished, hopelessly, that she didn't feel so right about what she'd been trying to say. She wished that, at least, she could have said it calmly and reasonably instead of spitting it out in a cloud of cheap venom. She wished they hadn't met the Craddocks. She wished that Minnie Craddock wasn't going to have a baby. She wished her father were alive so that they could talk about Bruce. She wished she didn't feel ashamed of herself for being so far out of the troubled world. She wished that they could ride all the way home, as they were riding now, without speaking.

They reached the bottom of the hill and Fitzgerald came up beside her. She looked at Richard and found herself smiling a tentative sort of smile.

He said, "The next item upon our programme for this morning is a brief lecture by Mr. Richard Olivant, who is going to speak to you on the subject of *Life and the Beauty Thereof*. . . ."

"Oh, Richard," she said. "Don't let's go on with this!"

She could feel him smiling. "So," he said. "Axis tactics, huh? You attack me—I mustn't defend myself. Well . . . Mr. Olivant's address, ladies and gentlemen, will be in the nature of a defense against certain aspersions which have recently been cast upon him concerning his so-called insensibility to the so-called 'Beautiful Things' in so-called 'Life.' "

"Please, Richard," she said, but without any effect.

"It is the truthful contention of Mr. Olivant's arch-critic, ladies and gentlemen, that he, Mr. Olivant, refuses to be moved to tears, or even have his withers wrung, by such ideas or spectacles as any of the following—a pregnant woman, a one-armed soldier, wedlock, a silver-haired mother, old snap-shots, national anthems—or even babies' booties. . . ."

She was suddenly angry again. "You're awfully amusing, aren't you?" she said.

"It's your own brand of medicine." His voice was suddenly flat and hard: there was no laughter in it now, and she was frightened.

He said, "But I won't use it any more if you don't like the taste of it. I won't use anything—except sense and some simple words. Though they're not really right, I'll use your two key words—'Life,' and the other one, 'Beauty.' Then there'll be less chance of your misunderstanding me. Like the vast majority of humans, you're basically a sentimentalist, and like all sentimentalists you won't try to look at life as a whole. Instead, you just hack off irregular little chunks and pieces for special inspection. This gives you utterly distorted ideas—not only about life itself but even about the pieces you've looked at. . . ."

He said, "Life's a pattern—an interwoven series of vast, intricate, multicolored designs which keep on shifting but never change. How can you look at a few haphazard segments and say, 'This one's good, that one's evil: this one's beautiful, that one's ugly'? How can you possibly do that? Suppose you took a Kermanshah prayer-rug and a pair of scissors and blindfolded yourself and cut a dozen pieces out of it and threw it away and then looked at the bits. They'd be mixed in their intrinsic effect, wouldn't they?

You might have, say, four hideous bits, four comic bits and four beautiful bits. . . .”

He said, “Now suppose you took the mutilated rug and spread it out and fitted all the pieces back again into their proper places. What would you find? What couldn’t you help but find? You’d find that some, if not all, of your bits didn’t belong, when you saw them in their relation to the whole, in the arbitrary categories you’d placed them in. You might find the ones you’d thought funny fitting into a sad design, the ones you’d thought beautiful becoming part of something intricate and frightening, the hideous ones perhaps the very center of beauty. . . .”

He said, “So there can’t be any rule for what’s good or bad, hideous or lovely, about any slice or chunk of life which you happen to pick up haphazard. You can’t say this child is innocent or that murderer’s vile just because one’s an infant human and the other’s a killer, or just because teacher told you all babies were good and all murderers evil. You have to relate—or at least try to relate—each particular chunk to its particular design and then look—or at least try to look—at the design in relation to the whole pattern. . . .”

He said, in an entirely different voice, “That’s a hell of a long way of saying ‘Judge everything on its merits,’ isn’t it? Or any of a dozen similar bromides. I’m sorry. I must’ve been on the defensive. You seem to have a knack of putting me there. What I was trying to do was explain that my *knocking*, as you call it, of some old-established sentimentalities isn’t caused by any inferiority complex or superiority simplex, or even by a plain desire to be snooty: it happens because I like to think—or like to try to think, if you’d rather have it that way—and because I have a rooted objection to adopting synthetic, standardized

thought, however cellophane-wrapped, streamlined and up-to-the-minute it tries to be. . . .”

He said, “And that, you will be glad to hear, ladies and gentlemen, concludes Mr. Olivant’s talk. . . .”

There was a silence which seemed to be heightened by the gentle creaking of leather and the soft thudding of hooves.

McTavish broke it. He reached at his bit and ground his teeth a little—and there came from his throat a strange noise which was half-grunt, half-groan and wholly expressive of blissful relief.

Janet tried to stifle a giggle; then let it become full-throated laughter as Richard turned a startled glance on Mac and said, “I didn’t know it was as bad as that, sir,” and began to laugh himself.

They were still laughing as they reached the end of the field beneath the hill and came onto an oiled road which ran dark between green trees.

The sunlight came through the trees and splashed strange devices of gold on the black surface of the road. Each of the eight hooves sounded separately, with an oddly hollow resonance, and there was a faint ghost of breeze which played cool upon Janet’s neck.

She stopped laughing. She turned toward Richard and saw only his dark profile. She said:

“Richard!” and when he moved his head and his eyes met hers, “I’m sorry I lost my temper.”

“I’m not,” he said.

“Why?” She looked at him in surprise.

He pulled Fitzgerald nearer; then leaned toward her and took her hand and lifted it gently from where it rested on



her thigh and put it to his lips. He kissed the full softness at the base of her thumb, and she caught her breath.

"Wait and see," he said.

*The time when Fitzgerald won his second race—and, instead of staying at Ventana for the night, they brought him home and then had a late dinner at the Inn. It should have been a good day—for Fitz had more than proved himself; she and Richard had been alone together, except for the actual period of the race, all the time; they had each made a very satisfactory lump of money—and both George Murdock (who might be prejudiced) and that old sage of 'chasing, Walter Burfield (who certainly wasn't), had assured her that despite Fitzgerald's brilliance at lesser distances, McTavish was a very good chance indeed for the four miles of the Gran Premio. . . .*

It should have been one of those wonderful days. But it hadn't been. There wasn't anything wrong that she could put her finger on; there wasn't anything wrong at all. It just hadn't been a wonderful day. . . .

Before dinner, she sat alone in the bar for a few moments and wondered why it hadn't been wonderful: she supposed it was her fault—and then was sure it wasn't. . . .

She didn't want to think about it any more. There wasn't really anything to think about. Someone had left an evening paper on the stool beside her, and she reached out idly and picked it up.

The headlines were blazoning an amazing new facet of the unbelievable resurgence of Russian aggressiveness—and, following the story to an inner page, she saw in another column that a new organizer for the U.S.O. had arrived in California; an organizer whose brilliant capabilities were certain to ensure for the jaded, homesick

soldiers, sailors and marines a maximum of just the sort of relaxation and entertainment which they so sorely needed; an organizer whose name was Bernard Arnstein! . . .

She was still reading when Richard came and stood beside her—and she didn't put the paper away this time. She was too much interested and excited by what she'd been reading, and quite against precedent began to tell him about it while he ordered drinks.

She said, "The Russians are still doing marvellously. Aren't they amazing?" And then she said, "And what d'you think? Bernie Arnstein—my darling old Bernie—he's in California. At San Esteban. And he's head of that troop-entertainment thing—U.S.O., isn't it?"

"The Boche overstretched himself," Richard said. "I thought he might. . . . And who's Bernie Arnstein? I think you told me, but I've forgotten."

She thought: *Why, why, why does it upset me when he talks like that? He didn't say anything wrong—just common-sense and a question.*

She said, "They ought to have you on the Russian Staff, darling. . . . And Bernie Arnstein used to be my agent and manager and banker—and my best friend!"

They drank the cocktails in silence. Richard ordered two more—and when they arrived she said, "I believe I must've sounded bitchy just now. I'm sorry, Richard."

"I rather like it." He smiled at her. "And apropos of the Russian Bear—I meant to show you this." He pulled out his wallet and fumbled in it and gave her two folded sheets of yellow paper. "Collected them after the concert the other day. While your fan was talking to you."

She unfolded the sheets—for some reason with a sinking heart. They were handbills. One announced the concert they had heard—Ludstrom, Marini and the San Esteban

Symphony Orchestra—Proceeds to Russian Relief; the other, dated only a few months earlier, heralded a grand performance, All Proceeds to Finnish Relief, by Ludstrom, Marini and the San Esteban Symphony Orchestra.

"Passed to you," said Richard while she read them. "Without comment."

She laughed. She had to laugh. But she was angry inside.

"What's the matter with ants, anyway?" she said defiantly as they sat down to dinner. "They're clean, and industrious ——"

"And very National-Socialist," said Richard, twisting the whole thing completely around again.

She said brightly, "You are a bastard—as I've mentioned several times before." She hoped she sounded happy, because she was far from feeling it.

They were half-way through the meal when she happened to look out of the window and see the lights of a car coming much too fast up the winding curves of the hill toward the Inn. She didn't say anything—but went on watching them. They gave her a very unpleasant feeling. They seemed dangerous—not in themselves, but in their implication, though she hadn't really any idea what this might be. . . .

She felt that Richard was watching them too—and looked at him and found he was.

The lights became a visible car. It swung sharply across their vision before it reached the lawn, and roared along the little-used stretch of pathway which led directly to Mr. Fowler's bungalow.

She knew now why she'd been frightened. She looked at Richard again and knew that he was frightened too.

The car stopped with a squeal of brakes and a spurting

of gravel. It was squarely in front of the bungalow. Two men, carrying small dark bags, broke out of it and ran up the steps.

And then she saw the Greek. The doorway of the bungalow became a yellow oblong, and he was there. The men with the bags brushed past him—and the yellow oblong disappeared.

She was more frightened still, and she turned to Richard. He was looking out of the window, frowning.

He said, "Doctors," as if he didn't want to believe it. "That heart . . ." she said.

He stood up suddenly and left the table. She half rose to follow him, then sank back again onto her chair. She'd only be in the way.

From the window, she saw him cross the lawn at a run. He went up the bungalow steps—and was gone.

She held her breath—and then saw him again almost at once. He came slowly down the steps and across the grass—and in a few seconds was sitting down opposite her.

She looked a question—and he lifted his shoulders a little and shook his head.

"Shouldn't've gone," he said. "Not yet."

They waited—and drank coffee in silence. The bar and the dining room were full and the waiters bustled about and the place was heavy with talk and laughter.

They went on waiting—and at last saw the Greek come out of the bungalow and stalk across the lawn toward the Inn. He came up the verandah steps and through the door beside their table. They turned and looked at him—but he just went straight on through the dining room and the bar and out into the kitchen.

The swing-door shivered—and then was still. It opened again to admit Sherry, pulling on a dark coat over a very

white shirt. The Greek came past him and hurried out by the far door. She jumped up to speak to Sherry as he made for the verandah.

She said, "Oh, Sherry—is he . . . is he very bad?"

"Don't worry too much, Miss." The brown eyes were steady. "Awful bad spell—but they think he's gonna be all okay. . . . Jest goin' down to bring the nurse."

They watched him go—and then waited until they saw him come back up the hill in the Greek's car and shepherd a starched white figure into the bungalow.

Then she went slowly up to her house, while Richard lingered to get the latest tidings.

She was standing by the big window, looking aimlessly down at the amphitheater, when he came in.

She said, "What's really happened? How is he? . . . Honestly?"

"I spoke to the Greek," he said. "It's as all right as it can be. No immediate danger now. He'll have to go very easy, though."

She sat down suddenly. She said:

"Christ, I was frightened!" and then leaned her head back against him as he bent over the chair and put his arms about her.

"Oh, darling . . ." she said after a moment—and was once more safe inside the glass walls. . . .

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## Chapter Eleven

BUT the walls were bound to break: she had known all the time that they must break. So they did.

It was the Sunday morning which was exactly a week before the Gran Premio. It was a day which made it impossible to believe that this was December. The sun was gold and live and hot; the valley was green; the earth of the ride was firm and yet softly cushioned for Mac's feet as George Murdock gave him—after two racing miles around the gentle slopes of the foothills—the whole mile of the ride and both its fences. . . .

She talked to Murdock while Sherry put McTavish on the wash-rack and gave him his bath. The little square man was smiling his urchin's smile all the time. He was happy about Mac; he'd always thought Mac was a great horse; he thought Mac was still a great horse; he thought that maybe Mac was a greater horse than he'd ever been; he wasn't frightened of any competition over the four miles of the Premio. . . . He snickered, and added that he included stablemates in those he wasn't frightened of. . . .

"An' what a mount for a guy to have in his last race!" he said—and was solemn-faced for a moment before the grin came back.

"Be in the Army in under two weeks," he said—and she wished him luck again and shook hands with him and liked him very much. . . .

But she wished, as soon as she'd watched his flashy red car disappear around the corner by the Inn, that she didn't have that lurking doubt about McTavish, as ridden by George Murdock. . . .

She was annoyed with herself for this doubt, and was glad for once that Richard wasn't near to sense the doubt in her—and then refrain from saying anything at all.

She went up to her house and washed her face and hands and ran a comb through her hair and went back to the stables again in time to pronounce McTavish dry and put him away while Sherry got the feed-tins ready.

She was buckling Mac's blanket when she heard footsteps she didn't recognize and looked out to see Colonel Tiernay. He was in tweeds—and for a moment she didn't know who the tall, erect figure belonged to. He had come to a halt in front of Fitzgerald's box and was staring at Fitzgerald's lovely supercilious head.

She went out to him and said, "Good morning, Colonel Tiernay," before he was aware of her.

He wheeled around and plucked off his hat and smiled at her, his moustache lifting at the corners. He returned her greeting and said something about the weather and California—and then asked for Richard.

"Thought I'd stop by and see him," he said. "I'm a stickler when I start, you know—and we want that stallion!"

They turned to look at Fitz again, and shifted a little nearer to his box. He didn't move his head, but one ear twitched back and his eyes seemed to gleam.

Janet felt uncomfortable. She said uneasily, "Isn't he the most beautiful thing you ever saw?" And then she said, very quickly, "Colonel Tiernay, if I were you I wouldn't say any more to Rich . . . to Mr. Oliv . . . to Richard, I mean. I know it's useless—and . . . and it

makes everything so horribly uncomfortable for everybody when he has to keep on saying 'no.' I don't think he particularly likes saying it, though I suppose it might seem as if he does. You see, practically his whole life's wrapped up in Fitzgerald—and it's just . . . just no good to keep on asking him! If it was anything else of his, now, I'm sure he'd give it to Uncle Sam like a shot. . . ." She nearly stopped, wondering whether she was telling the truth, then hurried on to cover the hesitation.

She said, "I know this isn't any of my business, really—but I just wanted to save you trouble—and all of us embarrassment—and . . ."

She cut off the words abruptly, for Richard was walking into the yard. She saw his eyebrows go up as he recognized Tiernay, but he changed direction and made straight for them. She wanted to get away, but couldn't think of any exit line which wouldn't seem rude. She felt herself coloring foolishly—and to cover up pulled a handkerchief from her pocket and pretended to be blowing her nose.

Richard said, "Hello, Tiernay," in a voice which was rather too non-committal.

"Ah, there," said the soldier. "How are you? . . . Just thought I'd drop by and have a look at the horse."

Richard was smiling the smile she didn't like. It wasn't showing on the outside—but she knew it was there inside him. He said:

"Look all you like," and waved a hand at Fitz. "Right behind you."

And just at that moment she dropped the handkerchief. She didn't know she had until Colonel Tiernay stooped with gallant alacrity to pick it up—and offered, in stooping, a broad, tight, tweed-covered inducement to all the impishness in Fitzgerald's Irish-ancestored soul.



She saw what was coming but was powerless to stop it. The black head was lowered. The full stretch of the satin-black neck was thrust outward and downward over the box-door. The strong teeth glistened as the lips rolled back from them, then nipped with heavy, brutal sharpness at the tweed expanse.

A sound, half grunt, half stifled cry, came from the victim—and he straightened sharply and wheeled about. One hand held her handkerchief, the other was pressed momentarily to the injured part. He was very red in the face—and she felt awfully sorry for him. She didn't want to laugh: the nip must have been too hard, both on the flesh and the pride. Besides, Richard was laughing. He was laughing so much that there was a glint of tears in his eyes. She almost hated him.

Colonel Tiernay laughed too. It was a praiseworthy effort, but he winced a little as he moved, staring at Fitzgerald ruefully. The stallion, his head high again, looked down his nose with half-closed eyes. She almost hated him too.

She said, "That damn horse is a public menace! . . . I'm so sorry, Colonel!"

Richard went on laughing. He said, "Fitz doesn't like the Army either!"

She said again, "I'm so sorry, Colonel Tiernay," and held out her hand. She said, "I have to go now. I hope I'll see you again soon."

And for once she left Mac's feeding to Sherry, going straight back to the house and hearing, or imagining she was hearing, Richard's laughter going on and on.

She bathed and changed very quickly, and as she walked down the path to the driveway, she saw Tiernay's car just pulling away from the Inn. She didn't turn toward the

stables, but made for the Inn herself: she'd have lunch alone for once, she thought—and get quietly over the anger which persisted in churning about inside her.

She looked at her watch. It was early for lunch—but what did that matter? She went around to the back of the Inn, hesitated, decided it was too early to drop in and see Mr. Fowler without being shooed away by the nurse, who would be leaving tomorrow anyway—and made her way up the verandah steps toward the dining-room entrance.

She was conscious of the radio blaring in an excited, urgent voice before she was in the room. But she was busy with unpleasant, formless thoughts and paid no attention to its words. Even after she was sitting at their table in the window, kept from the bar by the knot of men who seemed to be crowded around the metal voice with an air of vaguely irritating tenseness, she paid no attention.

She looked around for a waiter—and saw a bunch of three white coats grouped in the open doorway of the kitchen—all turned toward the metal voice. . . .

Against her will, she began to listen to it. It had suddenly struck her as extraordinary that not one of the men had moved or spoken since she'd come in. She felt oppressed—and, for no reason that she could think of, frightened.

She heard some of the words now. She didn't quite understand them—but she felt more frightened still. She found that she was standing, halfway between her table and the bar, without knowing she'd left her chair.

The voice grew quieter. It sounded tired. It said it would talk again in a few minutes, when there would doubtless be some more news.

She went up to the group at the bar. One of them was the Greek, and she spoke to him.

She said, "I only just came in, Mr. Lenardos." She made a little gesture toward the radio. "Was that . . . did they say . . . it seemed to mean . . ." Her words seemed to be all knotted up.

He looked at her impassively—and told her what it meant in six words.

She stared at him and he said, "Oh, it's true all right," and turned away.

She found herself walking quickly to the door—and when she was outside she started to run. She had to tell Richard—and at once. She'd forgotten all about being angry with Richard—she had to find him.

She was out of breath when she reached the stables. She looked around, panting, and couldn't see anybody. But she could hear him moving about in the converted tack-room and ran over to it and up the steps. She turned the handle and plunged through the door and found him pulling on a shirt. Gasping because she hadn't got her breath back yet, she told him.

His face came out of the shirt. He looked at her—and a little smile twisted his mouth and he whistled.

She said, "I'm going up to the house to be by the radio. Hurry!"

She turned to the door and pushed through it. She thought she heard him say something but didn't catch the words. She said, "Hurry!" again over her shoulder and ran off.

She'd heard it all by the time he arrived. She left the radio on and talked over it, trying to tell him everything at once. He sat down and listened to both voices for a

while and then, when she'd finished, to the radio alone. He didn't say anything—but after a time got up and made a drink for both of them and when it was finished suggested lunch.

He said, "I'm hungry," and walked over to where she was sitting and lifted her by the elbows and stood her on her feet. Just as he did so, the radio said, "We will return you to the station now—but stand by for further news flashes!"

She wanted to talk as they walked over to the Inn. But she didn't for some reason—and they went all the way in silence. The dining room and the bar were empty now except for a lone and startled-looking waiter, but the voices of two different radios came from the kitchen and the place they called the "Club Room."

Richard ordered, and she said to the waiter, "Oh—soup or something," and then there was more silence.

She lit a cigarette and refused a drink and ground out the cigarette.

She said, "You're awfully *placid*, aren't you?" in a tone she'd meant to be light but which didn't come out that way.

She said, "I suppose you knew it was going to happen?" in quite a different voice.

He laughed at her. "Take it easy," he said—and then, "As a matter of strict fact, I remember telling you, about three weeks ago, that if they did attack us, they'd be smart enough to do it before the bell rang for the first round."

She did remember. She said:

"But doesn't it . . . doesn't it *affect* you at all?"

"Affect me?" He stared at her. "If you're using the word properly—of course it does. . . . If you're using it the way I think you are—I don't know yet. . . ."

She pushed back her chair and stood up. She said:

"Come over when you've finished your lunch," and walked away. For some silly reason her eyes seemed to be blurred with tears.

She argued with herself as she walked back over the crunching gravel. She tried, very logically, to tell herself that the sick, ominous feeling of impending personal doom which lay so heavily on her was caused by faulty feminine nerves. She tried to tell herself that she was a scaremonger and Richard a sane and balanced being. She tried to tell herself that, when all the initial excitement had died down, she would realize Richard's impersonal, unflurried attitude had been right and hers all wrong. She tried to tell herself that there was nothing really wrong—really personally wrong—between them except a different attitude toward national catastrophe. She tried to tell herself a lot of things—and didn't succeed in being at all convincing.

She went back into her house and switched on the radio again and sat beside it and smoked cigarettes which didn't taste and burned her mouth. And the doomish feeling persisted. For the first time in many weeks she thought actively and selfishly of Bruce. . . .

She remembered how Bruce had always said that he could never break with a friend or fire a servant or get rid of a horse or cool off a girl at the time or times when they did the things which weren't right. . . .

She could hear his voice—*I never can, Jay! I never can! I wait and wait and wait—and then it all piles up too much and I give 'em the works for some entirely phoney reason—like not passing the salt quick enough, or something damn silly like that!*

She tried to concentrate on what the radio was saying and couldn't. . . .

She lighted another cigarette and stood up and began to prowls about the room. She said aloud, "What you need, Janet Katherine Elliot, is either something that's never been invented or a good whipping! . . ."

When Richard arrived, she was sitting down again—and again listening to the radio, which was now relaying eye-witness accounts of either something or nothing from Manila. He opened the door—but he didn't come right in. He just put his head in. He said:

"I'm going down to see Craddock about that new lot of hay. Want to come along?"

She stared at him. Somehow, she couldn't reconcile this perfectly ordinary question with all she had been thinking. She shook her head.

"All right." His tone seemed frighteningly cheerful, and almost insultingly everyday. "Be back when I'm through."

The head withdrew itself—and the door closed. . . .

It was getting dark when she heard his step on the path again, but she hadn't turned on any lights. She didn't know how the time had gone; she'd been thinking in squirrel-cage circles. Thinking—and wishing, desperately and hopelessly, that Bruce was with her.

The radio was still on: she supposed she'd heard most of what it had said—but she wasn't at all sure. She stood up and looked at Richard as he came toward her.

"Want a drink?" she said—but didn't insist on getting it when he offered to himself.

She sat down again by the radio—and Richard came back with two glasses and gave her one which she took mechanically. He stood with his back to the fireplace, looking down at her.

The radio said, ". . . such an act of treachery as has

never before been perpetrated! . . ." It had a finicking, somehow foreign precision to its voice.

Richard said, "That ape gives me a pain in the seat!" And he leaned over and turned the switch and there was silence.

She said, "Oh, Richard!" and checked herself. She said, "He is a bit annoying, isn't he?" and then looked at her watch and remembered something she had heard an announcer promise for just this time. She switched the radio on again and began to twist the dial, talking nervously as she did so. She said:

"We ought to hear the special round-up they're having, though. It's from all the places where . . ."

She didn't get any further. He came and stood beside her chair and put one hand on her shoulder while he stretched out the other to turn the switch again and silence the voice from the box. He laughed a little as he said:

"Oh, no, honey,—not any more! So America's been attacked—so we won't really know what's really happened until everybody's calmed down. . . ."

He leaned over her and put both arms around her so that his hands came over her breasts. His mouth pressed against the side of her neck.

"Janet"—he said—and then stopped as she tore herself free and stood up with such a violent movement that the chair fell behind her.

"No!" she said. "No!"

He stared at her—then reached out a hand as if to touch her again.

"No!" she said—and her own hand came up at the end of a tensed arm and struck him hard on the side of the face.

She said, "You can't drug me like that any more!" before

she realized she had hit him. But then her palm began to sting and there was a funny, sharp little ache in her stomach and she looked at him through the dim light and saw an added darkness on one cheek of his dark face and a little thin wet line, even darker, just below his temple. She caught her breath and clutched at the stinging hand with the other and found that the stone of her ring had worked around to the inside.

He looked at her and said, "The bell hadn't gone," and then smiled and sat down on the arm of the couch and went on looking at her.

She said, "I didn't mean to do that. I'm awfully sorry I did that."

His eyes never left her face: she could feel them more than she could see them. It was growing really dark now, and it seemed cold in the room although she knew it wasn't. She said:

"I wish I hadn't done that. I ought just to've said what I have to say: there wasn't any need to behave like a fish-wife. . . ." And then she couldn't go on. She was cold and calm, but it wasn't easy to get her breath.

"What do you have to say?" His voice was flat and hard. "Or perhaps you'd better leave it unsaid, d'you think?"

"No. I have to say it—I have to!" She reached out and switched on the lamp which stood at the end of the couch. But his face was in shadow and she still couldn't see it. She said:

"This is over, Richard. . . . You and me, I mean. It—it was wonderful while it lasted; at least, I thought it was wonderful. But it's over—I can't go on with it. I—we—we aren't the same sort of people. I—I'm just an *ordinary* woman; I can't live on the top of a sort of observatory mountain shut in a little glass case with you and some horses—especially when I never know how long we're go-



ing to be there. . . . I'm not brilliant and detached. I'm not an observer of the ant-heap! I don't even know how to observe it—and I probably wouldn't like observing it if I did. . . .”

She said, “I belong in the ant-heap. I think it's right, when you are an ant, to be one—not to set yourself up on a little homemade Olympus and think how ridiculous the rest of the ants are! . . .”

She stopped. She'd run out of words. The words she'd said hadn't sounded right. They weren't right. But it didn't make any difference. She couldn't find any more. And she was having that difficulty in breathing again—as if a piece of hot, fine wire was drawn tight around her lungs.

There was a long silence—and then he stood up. He seemed very tall. He stood over her. She couldn't see his face properly.

He said, “You sounded as if you meant all that,” in a voice she wouldn't have been able to recognize if she hadn't been looking at him.

“I do,” she said. “I do! . . . I have to. Don't you understand? I have to!”

He looked at her for another long moment. She could feel his eyes again. The wire was dreadfully tight now; it was so tight that there was a singing in her ears. Through it she heard him say something, two or three words at the most. But she couldn't sort them out.

He turned away from her. He didn't move quickly, nor slowly; just turned away. He crossed the room and the heels of his boots made little thudding sounds on the carpet, and then hard, tapping noises on the wood. They stopped, and the door clicked open, and then they rang hollowly on the porch, and the door was shut.

The door was shut. She started to say, “Richard!” and

was quiet and stood where she was, while the heels sounded down the path and then crunched away into silence along the gravel of the drive. She began to walk—up and down, around and around, past the big window, in and out of the passageway—up and down, around and around. . . .

After a while she discovered she was walking. So she stopped and found a cigarette and lit it—and then, with great decision, went out into the kitchen and poured herself a very stiff whiskey and put one piece of ice in it and very little soda.

She took a deep swallow which made her cough, and then carried the glass back into the living room and went deliberately to the big window and tried to look down into the little amphitheater.

But she couldn't see. The moon was young, and partly obscured by clouds. She couldn't see. She looked toward the stables. There was a light at the far end; past the corner of the box-stalls, she could see the glow of yellow which must be streaming from the tack-room window.

She turned away and began to pace again—and caught herself at it and sternly drank the rest of the whiskey in her glass and then went over to the little desk in the corner and got out paper and envelopes and began, very methodically, to write letters.

She wrote—*"Dear Mr. Fowler: Some very urgent personal business has made it necessary for me to leave here for a while. I'm so sorry I had to dash off like this without seeing you. . . ."*

She thought: *That's awful—but what else can I say?*

She wrote: *"As soon as I have a minute I will write to you from wherever I am. I don't know whether I've ever said it—but bless you for being so sweet to me!"*

She stopped there. She signed it and wouldn't read it

over. She folded it and put it in an envelope and addressed the envelope—and then sat quite still and discovered that she was listening.

The wire drew terribly tight again—and no boot-heels were crunching on the gravel.

She took another piece of paper and wrote: "*Dear Mr. Murdock: All my plans—like the world's, I suppose—have had to be changed. I won't be able to let McTavish run in the Premio. . . .*"

She dropped the pen and stared at the back of the desk. What about McTavish—and Bruce—and the terrific certainty that this was something Bruce wanted her to do? . . . Wasn't she just running away again; running away because something had hurt her?

No, she might be running again—but this time it wasn't away. She'd run away from the ant-heap in the first place—but now she was running back to it, to be an ant again. . . .

And, anyway, against Fitzgerald, what chance would Mac have stood? And what was the use of going on with the job if Mac stood no chance of winning? And hadn't it all been just an excuse for running away, a way of deadening the pain of Bruce's death, a . . . a pipe-dream?

She went on with the letter to Murdock: She wrote: "*. . . and am going to arrange for him to be scratched. I'm sorry about this—particularly for all the trouble I've caused you. I do hope you'll get another mount, and in case I've lost you any money I'm enclosing a check. . . .*"

She broke off and took out her check book and made rapid calculations and wrote much too large a check and then wound up the letter and put it, with the check, into an envelope which she addressed and stamped and then laid neatly on top of Mr. Fowler's.

She reached, slowly, for another piece of paper. But she didn't write anything on it. She didn't even pick up the pen. She sat very still—and caught herself listening again.

But there was nothing; no crunching on the gravel; nothing except the ticking of the clock which Sherry had given her on her birthday.

She stood up—and made a lot of noise in doing it. The wire was very hot and very tight—but she was very businesslike. She packed.

She packed both her suitcases and an overnight bag. She decided that the other things could wait until she was sufficiently settled—until life was sufficiently settled—for her to send for McTavish.

She was very businesslike. The bags all neatly stacked by the door, she went back to the desk again and found the note Bernie had written her from San Esteban. Blessing Mr. Fowler—not without a sudden pang—she picked up the telephone.

She was busy for ten minutes—but after that, when she finally put the phone down, she had ordered a car from San Pietro, booked a room for the night at the St. Carlos Hotel, arranged for a reservation on the six-forty-five for San Esteban tomorrow morning, and wired to Bernie.

God bless Bernie; she thought. She had wired, "Arriving San Esteban nine-forty tomorrow Monday can you put me up please love Janet"—and she knew there was no need to worry about the answer.

And then, suddenly, she had nothing to do. It would be some time yet before the car arrived—and everything was horribly, terrifyingly quiet. She could only breathe in little snatches, letting the air go down as far as her throat and no deeper.

She took her courage in both hands and looked at it. It

wasn't courageous enough—and she walked slowly over to the big window.

She didn't even try to look down into the amphitheater this time. She looked directly toward the stables.

There was no spray of yellow light now, reaching out beyond the boxes. Everything was dark.

She leaned her forehead against the glass—and her face contorted with the effort which was necessary to keep back the tears.

For a long time she stayed there without moving—but at last she straightened and let down the Venetian blinds and turned them so that they blocked all possibility of sight. She put out the lights at this end of the room and went into her bedroom and put on a hat, and took her coat from its hanger and went back into the living room and straight to the desk.

She sat down. She found paper and took up the pen. She wrote: "*Dear Richard—will you please, as official trainer, scratch McTavish from the Gran Premio? I've written to George Murdock, so don't worry about him. I will send somebody up for Mac pretty soon: I'm sure you'll see he's all right until then. Good-by—and good luck—and thank you for months I won't forget.*" She signed it, "*Janet,*" and then found that at last she was crying. . . .

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## Chapter Twelve

THE lights in the chair-car were switched off, and early daylight pointed up the dark, streaking telegraph poles beside the track and etched the sliding countryside in black and grey. The train seemed to be gathering speed and the wheels began to talk louder.

"What're you doing?" they said. "What're you doing? What're you doing?" The words came faster and faster, but always with the same measured monotony.

With wide, unblinking eyes, Janet watched the poles shuttle past the window. Her head felt numb, as if something very heavy had been dropped on it and she'd refused to say she was hurt. She didn't want to think—but the words kept prodding at her: "What're you doing? . . ."

She took a cigarette out of her bag and lit it and puffed furiously and tried not to think. She told herself she wasn't thinking—but she couldn't escape the knowledge that she was crying still. She was crying—although her eyes were dry and burning and there were no tears in them now.

She found it was impossible not to think, so she began to think hard about the world and its troubles, and how very soon it would all of it be embroiled in war. . . . But this didn't work—it was all too big to be imagined—unless, of course, one pretended it was very small and imagined that one was looking at it under a microscope. . . .

That wouldn't do. That was dangerous. Everything was

dangerous. No matter what rails she set her mind running on, they curved and brought her back—brought her back to the memory of last night—last night which seemed strangely far away and yet so painfully near. She kept feeling the sudden sharp impact of her hand upon his face and seeing the dark line of blood upon his temple. She kept feeling his unmoving eyes upon her face, watching her while she was telling him—steady shadowy eyes which she couldn't see. She kept hearing the chill unnaturalness of his voice when he finally spoke. She kept hearing the clicking of the door as it shut and the hollow sound of his boot heels on the porch and their distant crunching on the gravel as they went away from her. And she kept hearing the dead, heavy silence after they had gone—hearing it and feeling it. . . .

She told herself again that it hadn't really been her fault. She couldn't help it. She'd had to make the break. She twisted the ring round and round upon her finger as she sat staring out of the train window. . . .

So it was all over. It had been wonderful and impossible and now it was all over. And she'd really known all the time that it must end. But it could have ended some other way. It could have had a better ending than that. She could have just said "good night" calmly, and have gone away quietly without raising that discordant memory to keep haunting her. Or she could have waited. And one day she could have shaken his hand in a matter-of-fact way and said, "Good-by, Richard. We've both known, I think, that this wasn't a permanent thing," and they could have at least been friends. . . .

No, she couldn't! She couldn't have done it that way. She knew she couldn't! She couldn't have done it at all. How could she have done it? . . .

She'd better be careful. She'd better stop thinking. It was so much better just to feel numb, as if something heavy had been dropped on your head. . . . It was all over. . . .

But the chanting of the train wheels became insistent again. "What're you doing?" they chattered endlessly. "What're you doing? What're you doing?"

What was she doing? What was she going to do? What was there to do? She sat up more stiffly in her seat and held her head higher, as if the physical straightening might somehow help her to put her mind straight.

She must train herself to think about it without cringing. Or else she must forget about it entirely. Because she had other things to do. She was going to work. She was going to work with Bernie. She was going to fill her life so full of work that there wouldn't be room for memories.

She moved uneasily, trying to breathe. The pressure upon her chest was stifling her.

The train began to slow, and the brakeman came to the door of the car shouting, "San Esteban . . . San Esteban next!"

She went to the washroom and tried to make up her face. She straightened her hat and mechanically started pulling on her gloves. She went back to her seat. She looked out of the window and saw the white, red-roofed houses glowing with the warm brightness from the new sun. "Bernie will help," she said to herself. "Bless him—he'll help!"

She opened her purse again, to make sure she had the address in case he hadn't been able to send anyone to meet her. She began to worry: suppose he hadn't been there, and hadn't had her wire? Suppose he couldn't put her up? Suppose he wasn't even in San Esteban any more?



She almost pressed her nose against the window to get a better view of the station as they crawled alongside the platform.

She saw him at once. He was coming out of the ticket office, his over-dressed bulk conspicuous as he pushed his way through the little crowd of waiting people. She felt better. Dear Bernie—dear, solid Bernie, with his big diamonds and his bigger heart. She could see the stones glittering on his neck-tie and on the hand which took the cigar from his mouth as her coach rolled up beside him. She could see the close-shaven blueness of his jowls and chin: she could almost smell the clashing colognes.

She grabbed her purse and jumped to her feet and made for the door. He saw her while she was still at the top of the steps and came to meet her, brushing porters and passengers and red-caps aside as he came.

She said, "*Bernie!*" and missed the last step and landed safely and clutched his outstretched hand.

He beamed and threw away his cigar and took her by the shoulders.

"Hello, dear!" he said. "How are you, dear?"

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## Chapter Thirteen

IT WAS the fourteenth of December here in San Esteban, but at Ventana it was the day of the Gran Premio. She'd been thinking of it as she finally got to sleep at three o'clock: she was thinking of it now, as she waked a few hours later. It couldn't be more than a few hours later, for the sun was only just beginning to show above the tree-blurred outlines of the hills.

She rolled over in bed and stared at the wall. She didn't want to think about the race. She didn't want to think at all. She wanted to go back to sleep, and sleep until a more reasonable hour, when Bernie and his household would be up and dressed and ready for coffee and bacon and eggs and the papers.

The mornings were the very worst part, she'd found. Every night she told herself she would sleep until nine or ten—but every morning she found herself wide-awake to hate the sunrise.

She pulled the sheet over her head and screwed her eyes shut. But it wasn't any good. Damn Ventana and steeplechasing. . . . Damn the Valley. . . . Damn everything! . . .

The hot wire was tight around her lungs again—and she told herself fiercely that she'd come to a new decision; another new decision. She would clean those months out of her memory. She wouldn't remember them—not any

part of them! She wouldn't remember the night she'd met him, nor that first night at Ventana, nor the last night—the night she'd left him! She wouldn't remember! . . .

She threw off the covers angrily and sat up. What was the use? She might as well get up and dress. She'd go to walk along the beach again. She'd walk fast. She'd run—run until she was so tired she *couldn't* remember. She *would* beat it! It could be done! You could do anything if you had enough guts. And she had enough guts; more than enough.

She jumped out of bed and took a shower so cold that it made her teeth chatter. She was out of the house in less than fifteen minutes.

She closed the door behind her quietly and stood for a moment on the big verandah which faced the sea. The December sun was weirdly warm and the birds sang and unlikely flowers in Bernie's garden gave off agreeable smells and the tireless waves rolled calmly and pleasantly up onto the shore below. It was a lovely day—a wonderful day for the race. . . .

She ran down the steep steps which led to the beach and began to walk fast, looking straight ahead of her, paying no heed to the sand which broke away beneath her feet and filtered in around the toes of her sandals; paying no heed to the sun-lacquered sea which crept so close that sometimes she put her foot into the foaming edge of a wave she hadn't noticed. She didn't see the sprawling crabs scuttling away from her feet as she stumbled over the rocks, nor the close-packed troops of Mother Carey's Chickens advancing and retreating on the sand with each slow wave, nor the swooping gulls above her head. She saw Ventana horses on their way to the post; she saw the jumping course

in the bright green infield; she saw a great-striding black horse, and the smooth-flowing back of his rider. . . .

She went faster—and she saw the last fence, and the red-and-white silks sliding without effort into the lead and then past the judges' stand with nothing nearer to them than a furlong. . . .

She tripped and nearly fell. She knew suddenly that she had been almost running, and that she'd come a very long way. She knew, too, that she was tired. She turned and looked for Bernie's house, but it was out of sight.

She started back, walking very slowly now. Her legs felt trembly, and she sat down on a rock and lit a cigarette and stared out at the placid sea. On the horizon was a fleet of fishing boats—but she didn't see them. She saw the Rockwell Kent hills brooding over the Valley, and the moonlit amphitheater with the deer and the bobcat coming down to the stream to drink together. . . .

Two low-flying Coast Guard planes came up from the south and roared over her head like angry wasps. But she didn't hear them. She heard the noise of a little river between its willows, and the rhythmic clop of the hooves on the brown earth and the clean high tones of a boy's voice, and the tolerant chuckling of a wise old man, and the muted strings of an orchestra playing *The Vienna Woods*, and an urgent whisper in her ear, "*Janet! . . . Please!*"

She stood up and drew a deep breath and looked all about her methodically, determined to impress upon her consciousness all that she really was seeing—the blue-green transparency of the sea—the jagged solidity of the cliffs—the sunlight which warmed the trees and sparkled on the water below them—the toy fishing-boats—all the things which were near her, within reach of her eyes and body.

But the effort wasn't any use. It was of less use this

morning than it ever had been. She began to walk, mechanically. She grazed her ankle against a rock, but she didn't feel the pain; she felt hard, powerful arms about her body, pressing her close to another body; she felt lips warm against her throat; she felt the vibrations of the deep voice which made her name beautiful. . . .

She managed to get into the house and up to her room without being seen. When she came down, she found Bernie in the breakfast room with the Sunday papers spread out in confusion all around him.

He waved one sheet at her as she went to the table.

"Hello, dear," he said. "Seen the headlines?"

She sat with her back to the light. She said, "'Morning, Bernie. No—are they good?"

He pondered this while a maid brought her coffee and orange juice. He said:

"Bit of both, I suppose, dear. Considering how we let ourselves get caught with our pants down, we seem to be doing pretty good."

She said, "I finished that arrangement for you last night—the *Manhattan Serenade* one."

He stared at her. "Already, dear? You know something—you're overdoing."

She avoided his eyes. "As long as I'm *doing*, that's all."

He said, "We-ell . . ." in a dubious tone and went back to the papers.

She reached out and took part of one he seemed to have finished with. She was turning over the pages when he began talking again. He said:

"It may take a long time to whip these bastards—but when we've done it—and done it good and proper—it'll maybe turn out f'r the best. Get the world run right, by

the right people. . . . No more militaristic tyrannies, no more war, no more foolin' with the poor guy in the street. . . ."

She laughed at him—and he looked up, surprised.

"Bernie!" she said. "I'm surprised at you! 'No more war,' did you say? And you an intelligent man! Get some perspective—and you'll realize that as long as there are two men in the world, one of them'll have something the other wants—and then there'll be a fight. . . ."

She suddenly heard what she was saying, and stopped abruptly. She felt Bernie looking at her and knew his eyes were shrewd and puzzled without looking at them. She took refuge in the paper—and while he muttered something about maybe she was right at that, dear, found herself faced by the racing news. . . .

She hadn't known until this moment that she had been looking for it. She couldn't imagine why she should want to see his name, barely discernible in small blurred print, as the Owner, Trainer and Rider of b. h. Fitzgerald.

She saw the words "Gran Premio" in the headline, and something about a favorite—but she paid them no attention, and ran her eye down to the race-chart, telling herself that perhaps she had a masochistic streak.

She tried to laugh at herself and failed completely—and then jumped as, all at once, from the long list of entries, a name stood out in sharp relief, as if it had somehow gotten itself embossed. It deepened and blackened and seemed to grow larger as she stared.

"El McTavish," it read. But that wasn't all. The Owner's name was "J. Elliot"—and the Jockey's, "R. Olivant." . . .

She said aloud, "What a stupid mistake!" and then, running her eye up to the column above the chart, saw the name *Fitzgerald*.

She read with her breath catching in her throat. She read, ". . . upset in the pre-post betting caused by the scratching, two days ago, of the sensational Fitzgerald. . . ."

That was as much as she read. She threw the paper down just as Bernie said, "What's the matter, dear? Anything wrong?"

"Yes," she said. "No, I mean . . . I don't know . . . I have to phone . . ."

She ran across the hall and into the living room and dialed long distance with fumbling fingers.

It seemed to take hours—but at last they said, "Here is your party," and she was talking to the Inn.

She said, "This is Miss Elliot. Please put me through to Mr. Fowler's bungalow. At once. It's very important!"

There was no remonstrance—and in a second she was talking to the Greek. She said:

"Mr. Lenardos? This is Janet Elliot. I . . ."

"Just a minute," he said before she could get any further. She could hear a muffled murmur as he spoke to someone away from the transmitter—and then his voice again.

"The old man says, where are you speaking from?"

"San Esteban. Can I speak to Mr. Fowler, please? I . . ."

Again she was interrupted. "Minute," said the Greek—and once more came the muffled murmur.

He spoke to her again. He said:

"Old man says you're to drive up here, quick as you can."

"But I . . . I don't understand," she said—and found she was talking to a dead instrument.

She ran back to the breakfast-room. She said, "Bernie, I've got to have a car. . . ."

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## Chapter Fourteen

SHE pulled the great roadster up outside the Inn, with a flurry of gravel, at exactly twenty to two. She'd made good time, wonderful time. She climbed out and ran across the garden and up the bungalow steps. The door was shut, but it opened before she reached it and the Greek stood square in the doorway.

"Not too long," he said. "And don't get him upset."

His tone was low—but not low enough. Mr. Fowler's voice came from somewhere in the house behind him. She knew it was Mr. Fowler's voice—but at the same time she'd never heard it before. It was quiet; so quiet that she wondered, even through all the other feelings which were clashing inside her, how she could hear it so clearly.

"Eddie," it said. "Get the hell outa here—and don't come back till I send for you!"

That was all—but the most extraordinary change came over the Greek. He looked smaller—and he stood to one side so that she could go in—and then he answered in a voice which she recognized as little as she had recognized Mr. Fowler's.

He said, "Okay," and then, without any pause between the words, "Okay Mr. Fowler sir."

Staring at him, Janet stepped through the door. It closed quietly behind her and he was gone.

She turned out of the little entrance hallway into the



living room. The nostalgic pang which hit her was swamped immediately by the sight of the figure in the wheel-chair. He looked thinner—and although he was sitting, taller than ever. And the small face didn't smile at her. She was frightened of him again.

He said, "Sit down," and then, without any preamble whatever, "What the hell sort of trick've you been pullin'?"

She sat down and made herself look at him. She said, "I . . . I couldn't stay. I had to get out." She didn't think of telling him anything but truth.

He smiled at her suddenly—and she didn't feel quite so frightened.

"You could've asked what business it was of mine?" he said.

"No." She shook her head. "No. I couldn't do that."

He caught hold of the wheels of his chair and moved it closer to her. His eyes were on hers, and she couldn't take her eyes away.

"You're a fool," he said. "You're both fools!"

"But not the same sort of fools, Mr. Fowler." Her hands were twisted together in her lap, and her nails were digging into her palms. This was all so quick, and hard, and uncompromising. It was brutal.

The old man smiled a hard smile. "You're human beings, aren't you? You both got arms and legs and all the other fittin's, haven't you?"

"Oh—you don't *understand!*" She felt desperate.

"What you—and Rich—don't understand'd fill a whole shelf of books! . . . But there's a couple things—one to each of you—that's the real trouble. Rich don't understand about livin'. . . ."

She wouldn't let him go any further. She said:

"Oh, you can't say that! Richard knows too much about

life, if anything. He's lived it so hard, and studied it so much, that he'll only concern himself with the bits of it he happens to like. . . ."

She bogged down—and Mr. Fowler laughed at her. He didn't chuckle, he laughed, and for some silly reason she was afraid again.

He said, "Rich don't know about livin'. He got at it the wrong way. He knows so darn much about *how* and *why* and because that he don't know anything about the racket itself. There ought to be a law against book-learnin'—man shouldn't be allowed to study about life till he's passed a test showin' he knows about livin' it."

She leaned forward in her chair. She watched his face and was astonished.

"But . . . but Richard hasn't only *studied*," she said weakly. "Look at the things he's done. . . ."

"Sure he's done things. Plenty. But he's done 'em with the wrong slant. He gets in a war when he's a kid—and that don't start him off right. Then he starts this studyin'—and then he's wrong two ways. An' it comes out so he just don't know about livin'."

She didn't say anything. Her head felt clear—and yet it was whirling. She knew this place and this man—but she didn't know them. She knew every inch of this room—but she felt she'd never seen it before.

He said, "What made you call this mornin'? See in the paper about him ridin' your horse? That it?"

She nodded. She thought she wasn't going to speak, but she said, "What about Fitzgerald? I don't understand . . ."

"Rich handed him over to Uncle Sam. Couple days after Pearl Harbor. . . . That was Tuesday. He phoned Tiernay. They took the horse away Wednesday. So he's

ridin' yours. He figured he'd give him a better race than Murdock. . . ."

"Oh . . ." Her voice didn't seem to sound like her own. "Oh . . . I see. . . ."

Mr. Fowler went on as if she hadn't spoken. "Guess he knew this race meant a lot to you, huh?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I think he did."

He shifted a little in the chair. "There's a lot been happenin' around here. . . . Take a look at this. . . ."

She looked—and saw that he had pulled a long, official sort of envelope from the pocket of his robe.

"That's for Rich," he said. "From Washington—and I know what's in it. They can get a move on even in the Capital if a person pulls the right wire. Tiernay yanked this one."

She bent over the envelope. . . . "Washington? . . . I don't understand. What is it?" Her eyes wouldn't focus properly.

"It's a commission. Army. It's a new one—or his old one back—or something. I don't get the ins an' outs—but that's what it is. Rich is in the Army again. . . ."

She sat up straight. Her eyes focused all right now. She looked into the small dark eyes which were so incredibly young. She said:

"Mr. Fowler—you don't understand. About what's wrong between me and Richard, I mean. *That*"—she made a vague gesture which somehow managed to include Fitzgerald and the envelope on the old man's knees—"that was only a little part of it. We . . . we're just not the same sort of people. . . ."

He chuckled: for the first time since she had arrived she heard the chuckle. He said:

"But you both got the right fittin's. . . . Maybe you'll

find out you're a little fool—maybe you won't. . . . Maybe it's best if you don't—but maybe it isn't."

A sense of time came back to her and she jumped to her feet. "I must go," she said. "Really I must go. I have to see Mac. I have to!"

He looked at a watch which hung too loosely on his wrist. "Sit down!" He waved her back into her chair. "You got time. There's another thing I want to tell you. . . ."

He said, "You like this place, don't you? The house—an' the stables—an' that valley? . . ."

He said, "I don't figure to last out a helluva lot longer. Few weeks at most. . . ."

"Mr. Fowler!" She stared at him, shocked.

"I got the actual date pretty certain in my mind." He grinned at her happily. "If it's not the second o' next month, I lose a bet with myself. . . ."

She found herself leaning forward toward him, with a hand on his arm. It felt shockingly thin beneath the silk. Perhaps she said something: she didn't know whether she'd spoken or not.

"Who's scared of dyin'?" he said. "Nobody is! Not unless they're still young. No, I'm full o' curiosity, that's all." He chuckled again. "But that's not what I was talkin' about. I'm talkin' about the place. I'm givin' it to you an' Rich—half each. Just the place—the dough's mostly for Eddie."

She started to say something—but he wouldn't let her. He said:

"But there's no strings on it. Either of you can wish it on the other. Or sell it. Or anything you damn please."

He looked at the watch again. "You better scram now," he said.

She couldn't say anything. She knew he wouldn't like it

if she said anything. There was a tight feeling in her throat and a hot prickling behind her dry eyes. She stood up again. He held out his hand and she took it in hers—and was surprised by the almost painful strength of his fingers.

He said, "Scram, will you!" and she turned away and made slowly for the door.

She remembered something before she reached it. She stopped and turned around.

"Mr. Fowler," she said. "There was something you were going to tell me—but you didn't. We lost it somewhere."

His eyes were twinkling. He knew. But he didn't speak. She had to speak.

She said, "You told me what Richard didn't understand. . . ."

"Yeah—livin'."

"But you didn't tell me what I didn't understand . . ."

"Lovin'!" There was no smile in his eyes or in his voice.

She stood and looked at him. She didn't understand.

He said, "The world was built around a man an' a woman. Don't go forgettin' that—it's God-awful important! So're things like wars, and politics—which're the same thing without quite so much shootin'; an' earthquakes; an' new ideas about who'll have what and where they'll have it. Those things're just happenstances: the world'll go on—with 'em or without 'em. There's only one thing the world won't go on without—because it can't go on without it—a man an' a woman. . . ."

He said, "So a man an' a woman's pretty important—if they're right for each other. . . . But you think you and Rich aren't right for each other. An' maybe you're not, just now—because there's something you're lackin', my girl! He can love you—but you can't love him."

She couldn't believe her ears. She said, numbly:

"I can't love Richard—but he can love me?"

"That's it. That's right. What's more, I'll say he *does* love you—an' you *don't* love him. You can't. You're missin' on a very important cylinder."

She walked back toward him. "Mr. Fowler—either I'm crazy, or I'm not hearing right. . . ."

"You're hearin' right! . . . And now I'll tell you. You're missin' because you never been sorry for Rich! . . . He's been sorry for you—plenty. But you've never been sorry for him. You can't so much as *imagine* bein' sorry for him. You don't think there's anything he can't handle himself, very adequate, so you can't even *think* sorry for him. . . ."

He said, "You got to be *able* to be sorry for someone—or you can't love 'em. . . . Those old-timers that wrote the English Bible, they had a good word for it—*compassion*. . . ."

He said, "Now you scram! Be seein' you—maybe."

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## Chapter Fifteen

SHE was going to be late. She knew she was going to be late. . . .

But she mustn't be late! The accelerator-pedal was hot; it was burning her foot. She wouldn't look at the speedometer—and she thanked God for the comparative thinness of the traffic. . . .

So the world was built around a man and a woman, was it? . . . Well, of course it was, if you came to think about it. . . .

So Richard—Richard—had given Fitzgerald to his country! And Richard—Richard—was going to be a soldier again! . . .

She was going to be late. But she mustn't be late. . . .

So there *had* been a pact with Bruce—and Richard was helping her to carry it out. Helping her nothing! Richard was carrying it out, for her! . . .

All the other cars—there were more of them now—were crawling. She kept passing them, with deep-toned tsst-s of displaced air as the Cadillac swept by. They were on pulleys, the other cars. They were coming back to her—the way other horses came back to McTavish in the last mile; the way other horses used to come back to Mac in the last mile.

Pulleys—that was what Bruce always used to say. . . .  
“Jay—it's just as if they were on pulleys! They come back

to him. I just sit tight, and keep the same hold, and tense on him a bit, and maybe go a little further up his neck. Then I start talking to him—and I suppose his stride lengthens—but it doesn't feel that way; it feels as if they were on pulleys, coming back to you. . . .”

So you couldn't really love anybody until you were sorry for them! . . . No, that wasn't right—that didn't make sense—and it wasn't what he'd said, either. . . .

So you couldn't really love anybody until you were able to be sorry for them! That was it—and perhaps that made sense?

Or did it? . . .

She was going to be late. And she mustn't be late! She was on the outskirts of San Pietro. She was coming into the wide highway alongside the bay. There were warships there still—but not so many of them. Not nearly so many of them. . . .

She was going to be late. She glanced at the speedometer and was frightened. She eased the pressure of her right foot too suddenly and was jerked forward in her seat by the drag of the engine, which spluttered and coughed, then obediently slowed its revolutions.

She was going to be late—but she would be later still if she was caught speeding. . . .

But how could you be *able-to-be-sorry* for someone like Richard—when you couldn't possibly conceive of him being in any position or dilemma which called for—for compassion? . . . How could you possibly? . . . Unless, of course—and her heart contracted at the thought—he was badly hurt physically. . . .

And that wasn't what Mr. Fowler meant. It wasn't that he meant—not that at all! . . .

She was in the heart of San Pietro now, and the traffic



was thick and every signal seemed to be red as she drew up to it and part of the main road was torn up and detour signs seemed to force her miles out of her way. . . .

She was going to be late. But she mustn't be too late! She kept herself under a rigid control which made her hands and stomach shake—but at last she came out of the town and the traffic thinned and she could make speed again.

The wind tugged at her; sometimes it almost took her breath away. Her hands were shaking when she moved them but they were rock-steady on the wheel. . . .

You couldn't be *able-to-be-sorry* for Richard. No one could—unless they were very different from her. . . .

So McTavish was going to run in the Gran Premio after all. Just as Bruce had wanted. Just as she had promised Bruce he would, and Richard—*Richard*—had made it possible—after he'd made it impossible . . .

And George Murdock *hadn't* been right for Mac! But Richard would be. . . . Wouldn't he? . . .

She was going to be late. But she mustn't be too late!

She divorced herself from all thought except thought of the race. She might make it. She must make it. She'd be a little late for all the preliminaries—but she might just catch the start. . . .

She must catch the start! She stole another look at the clock—and her right foot went down even further.

She wouldn't see them coming over from the stables for saddling—but she might see the start. . . .

She wouldn't see them filing over, led by their boys, prancing and walking and cutting up in their gaily-colored coolers. She wouldn't see Mac there among them, the white-clad Sherry proud beside him. She wouldn't see Mac, walking soberly and a little stiffly in the line, his crest

flattened out, his neck reaching forward as if he were trying to look like a bored pointer. She wouldn't see Mac with his upper lip curled in disdain for the fussing young equine show-offs around him. She wouldn't see Mac in his white-edged black cooler, looking like a deacon—a tough, disillusioned deacon—but definitely a deacon. . . .

But she might see the start. She must see the start.

She looked at the clock deliberately—and was a little heartened. . . . She came into the village on the American side of the border and found her way fairly clear and in no time at all was past the barrier and the little sentry with his “Ké-o!” and then was in Mexico and driving too fast over the arroyo bridge and turning left for the short-cut past the filthy façade of the Hotel Continentale and then coming out onto the road lined with the green peppertrees and then pushing the big car up to really tremendous speed. . . .

She was late. But she wasn't too late. She didn't see the deacon—but she did see the start. When she'd parked the car and run into the Horsemen's entrance and somehow or other fought her way into the Club-house enclosure and was standing on the top terrace—all by herself in spite of the astonishingly large crowd—the horses were already in line by the first starter, away down at the far end of the infield. . . .

She rubbed at her eyes, frowning to focus them. At first she could only see the horses and their riders as bright but indeterminate splashes of color. There seemed to be a great many of them—far more than she'd ever seen starting a Ventana 'chase before. . . .

And then she began to see them separately—and found, near the farther end of the ragged, restlessly shifting line,

the black cap and white, black-crossed silks—Bruce's colors, her colors. . . .

And she felt a frightful, a fantastic shock. Because, at this distance, it seemed that she was not only looking at McTavish, who was stiffly still in the peculiar crouch he'd always frozen into at a start—but it seemed also that she was looking at Bruce on McTavish's back. It wasn't only the familiar but still startling silks; it wasn't only Mac's strange posture; it wasn't because she was thinking about Bruce; it wasn't because, looking at McTavish and the silks, she must necessarily remember Bruce. . . .

It wasn't any of these things. It was that Richard actually looked like Bruce—Richard, who was tall and lean and dark, actually looked like Bruce, who had been shortish and blond and powerfully chunky. It was that Richard—surely the epitome of genius in horsemanship—knew so much of what the horse he was riding needed and liked and was accustomed to, that he became in himself all of those things. It was that Richard was riding this horse for her; that Richard was riding her horse; that Richard was the instrument of her pact with Bruce. . . .

And then the flag of the first starter came down. . . . The line of horses shivered—and plunged forward. . . .

And the second flag came down—decisively. They were off!

They came down to the first fence in two solid blocks—and much too fast for the four miles they had to go. Behind the second block, though, was a lone, long-striding, easy-going bay. And his rider wore white silks, with black sashes crossing back and front. . . . She caught her breath. He not only looked like Bruce, and sat like Bruce, he raced McTavish as Bruce had raced him. It was Bruce and Mac she was watching. Her heart swelled in her throat and

seemed to be choking her. She couldn't hear the crowd, or see their massed heads beneath her. She wasn't aware even of the raucous cackling of the loudspeaker. She was watching McTavish ridden as he should be ridden, running as he should run—McTavish, strong, brave, utterly unhurried. . . .

The first block came into the water jump. Two fell, sprawling masses of bulk and legs. . . . The second block came—and more fell. . . . Lengths behind them, even-striding, completely unflustered, decisive, came Bruce and Mac. . . . No! Richard and Mac. . . .

They came into the wings—and Mac took off . . . sailed . . . cut a neat four inches of brush . . . landed three feet beyond the water . . . galloped on.

She was uplifted. She was alone. She had tears in her eyes, but could see through them. She became conscious of a *pattern*—a strong, square pattern. . . .

They were past the grandstands now and going into their first turn, and they took the end brush smoothly and comfortably and drove on around the curve and then straightened into the back stretch and headed for the Liverpool. . . .

She couldn't help glancing at the Liverpool before they reached it. It was a nasty fence in any language, as Bruce would have said. She was horrified to see a horse in the ditch and struggling to get out. . . . And there was a jockey climbing out—two jockeys climbing out, while another loose horse was trotting aimlessly toward the judges' stand. There must have been a bad fall there—a very bad fall. . . .

She looked hastily back for McTavish. There he was—just coming into the wings. And the loose horse had his forefeet on the lip of the ditch now.

She shut her eyes—and held them shut. Although, until this moment, she had been unaware of the crowd, she heard it now. It drew in its breath with a great hiss—then exhaled it with a greater sigh: it almost sounded disappointed.

She opened her eyes—and saw McTavish again—going steadily, strongly, and safe on the far side of the Liverpool. He was already almost into the wings of the next fence. He was no nearer the leaders, and no farther behind them. . . . There was no sign of flurry about him, nor about the steady, almost unmoving figure on his back; the figure which looked so impossibly like Bruce. . . .

There was nothing the matter. They were safe. They were going right. They were going exactly right. . . .

She drew a deep and quivering breath—and began to realize how frightened she had been. She should have trusted them—both of them—not to be unduly worried by an open ditch with a loose horse in it which must be avoided or cleared. But somehow she hadn't—she hadn't seen how they could avoid disaster. . . .

She gripped the iron rail tighter and stared at the course and the jump and the racing shapes and vowed to herself that she would be cool and calm and collected; that she would watch McTavish run the race of his life, under the most perfect rider that any horse could wish; that she would look at the race as a whole, and study it, and realize what he had to beat and why; that she'd see every move, and every piece of good and bad and dirty riding; that she'd know exactly where Richard and Mac began their drive; that she'd imprint every foot of the race on her mind so that she could always remember it—the way Bruce had always remembered every inch of every race he had ever ridden or watched—so that afterwards, for always, she'd be

able to talk about it and describe it and discuss it intelligibly and with real knowledge. . . .

But she did none of these things. She couldn't. She'd been too frightened—or she was in too much emotional turmoil—or something. . . .

She couldn't. . . . Instead, she seemed to lose every power she had except that of standing upright, clutching the iron as if it was her only contact with reality in a world of whirling fantasies. She didn't hear the crowd or the bellowing loudspeaker above her head. She didn't see the course except as a green carpet with little moving dots on it. She knew that McTavish was one of the dots—and she knew that the black-and-white upon his back were her colors. And she knew that Mac had to win, was going to win. She knew all this—but the knowledge was somewhere buried in the back of her mind, so that it did nothing to sharpen her dulled senses. . . .

And then, for no reason, and as suddenly as she had entered it, she came out of this timeless, trance-like state. The course was no longer a green faraway blur, but a course. The horses weren't dots any more, but visible units, each one more different from his fellows than the man upon his back was different from the other riders. She knew that they had gone more than two of the four miles—even knew that where there had been twenty starters, only ten horses were running now. . . .

And she knew, too, that Mac and Richard had begun to "make their move." Now her sight was as sharp and perceptive as it had been blurred and ineffectual. She had been numb—now she was burning with a vivid fire of excitement. . . .

She struggled for breath and fixed her eyes on the white, black-crossed silks.

Slowly, they were closing the space between them and the horses ahead. . . . They passed one—and moved steadily up toward the next. She wanted to shout. She wanted to tell the crowd, and the whole world, and the heavens, and Bruce. She wanted to tell them about El Mc-Tavish. He still had it! He wasn't through! He wasn't tired and old! He was still a great horse—a great horse with a great horseman on his back!

She held on to the railing and clenched her teeth. He'd passed three horses now. He was taking the Liverpool for the third time—taking it with a rugged, ugly, studied ease. He was closing on another horse. . . .

He'd made the far turn—the tails of two more adversaries were coming steadily back to him. The pulleys were working; working for Mac and Richard as they had always worked for Mac and Bruce; working for Mac and Richard as they would never—she knew it now!—as they would never have worked for any other combination.

The pulleys were working. . . . He was sixth. . . . He was fifth. . . . What a horse he was—and what a God-sent, wonderful ride he was getting! . . .

She gripped the iron rail until her knuckles ached. . . . They were coming down past the stands—the first four horses—they were pounding down to the water again. . . . And Mac was fourth. . . .

He came into the wings on the heels of the third and outjumped him and took his place and raced doggedly on, reaching for the next. Richard was tight on his neck now. Richard looked more like Bruce than ever. She could see a gleam of yellowish-white as Mac's lips, bulldog-clenched, curled back. . . .

She could hear his name now, rising sharply from the crowd. . . . "Look at that Seven, will you!! . . ." "Catch

that El McTavish! . . .” “Watch that McTavish horse! . . .” There was something bitterly, sweetly nostalgic about the voices—shouting with the same surprised excitement as they always had, and at exactly the same stage of the race. They were the same voices, and Mac was the same horse—exactly the same horse. . . .

They made the far turn. . . . The chestnut in front of Mac, the one in second place, was tiring. She knew he was tiring; his tail was up and he looked unsteady. He was on the pulleys—and McTavish drew up on him with the awful implacability of a locomotive. . . .

She couldn't get the voices out of her ears. They were screaming—and the iron voice above her head was screaming. They were screaming Mac's name—roaring it, shouting it, dinning it up to the blue skies. . . . Mac's name, they were shouting—and another name—the name of the only horse in front of him now—the name of the grey horse who was beginning to come back, too.

They were thundering down at the Liverpool. And the gap between them was closing. . . . It was three lengths. . . . It was two lengths. . . . And the big grey was tiring. . . . She could see that he was tiring. . . . His tail was up, he was tiring!

But Mac wasn't tired. . . . She wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. She did laugh and cry at the same time—Mac wasn't tired! Mac had the last one on the pulleys. . . .

The grey's jockey looked back under his arm. The yawning ditch of the Liverpool was only a few strides in front of him. He pulled his whip and brought it down with venom. . . .

The grey jumped—and as he took off, she knew he wasn't going to make it. He wasn't going to make it! He cleared the white take-off pole and he cleared the ditch—but he



wasn't going to make it. . . . He couldn't clear that black, thick, five-foot brush. . . .

And Mac was right behind him—up to his quarters and a little to his near side. Mac had jumped—almost at the same instant. . . .

The grey hit the brush. He hit it hard—and low down. His great body was suddenly aimless and disjointed in the air. He fell sideways—and in a dreadful instant, she saw that he was falling across McTavish! . . .

“Oh, God!” she said aloud—and for one paralyzing, endless second, prayed for a miracle which would allow Mac and Richard to land right-side up on the other side of the jump.

But they didn't. . . . They were down. . . . The grey and his jockey were down—and so were they. . . .

Richard and Mac were down—and there were four dark, shapeless lumps on the bright grass which lay below the fence. . . .

She stood without movement. Her eyes were open, staring. But they didn't see anything. Her mind knew what her eyes were seeing, but there were no pictures in them. She knew that the other horses came straggling into the fence and jumped it, somehow missing the fallen bodies. She knew that what was left of the race went on. She knew that she was fighting her way down the stone steps, and onto the level of the track, and then through the crowd to the white gateway in the rail. She knew when the race finished. She knew she talked reasonably to Gatekeepers and Stewards, and showed her pass, and persuaded them against their wills. She knew she ran across the brown dirt of the track and into the green infield and onto the steeplechase course. . . .

She knew all this—but she didn't see anything. She

only began to see again when she was running across the infield, behind the water-jump, toward the Liverpool and the little crowd of horsemen and officials who were clustered there like the first flies of a swarm around a brand-new dung-heap. . . .

She began to see as she ran. She saw the grey horse, up and running loose. And then she saw his jockey, with the emerald-green silks stained with blood which ran down his face. . . .

She began to talk as she ran on. She said, "Oh, my God! . . . Oh, my God. . . ."

Then, as she reached the outer ranks of the swarm, and still couldn't see what it was that they were clustering around, she saw Richard's back. He was walking away, very fast, signaling to attract the attention of someone in the middle of the field.

So he was all right! . . . The black cloud lifted—but a cold grey cloud came down about her and took its place. She hadn't seen yet what the flies were around—but she knew. Very dreadfully she knew.

She heard them talking as she elbowed them aside, heard all their voices and all their words—and then one high-pitched voice above the others.

"Dead!" it said. "Deader'n a doornail! Broke his neck."

She was suddenly filled with a vast anger. How dared they? How dared they stand about and stare and discuss him like that when he was helpless—defenceless—dead? What did they know of his sort of courage and strength, his valor? . . .

She pushed through them, roughly and furiously—and then stopped, looking down; looking down at the motionless, sweat-blackened quarters. . . .

He lay upon his side, and his neck was still outstretched.

His head still reached forward, his eyes still looked straight ahead. And his strong, fine legs were still extended as if fixed forever in one last triumphant leap.

He looks *brave*, she thought—and the anger left her. He looks brave, she thought, and dropped onto her knees beside the head. Her eyes were blinded with tears which wouldn't fall. She reached out her hand and touched the shoulder. It was wet still—but the wetness seemed horribly cold.

She jumped up violently. She looked around her wildly at the half-seen faces which were turned to her—all of them.

"Cover him up!" she said. "Why doesn't someone cover him up? . . . Please cover him up!"

One of the faces came close to her—close enough to be properly seen. It was a wrinkled-leather, kindly face. And the arms which belonged to it carried a bulky roll which might be a blanket. It said:

"All right, lady—jest a minute!" and then one of its hands closed firmly on her arm and turned her away. . . .

Her vision began to clear—and she saw another face, one she knew. It was Sherry's face.

He was a little aside from her—and he didn't see her. He didn't see anything except McTavish's lifelessness. With desolate and empty eyes he stared down at the motionless shape: his face was grey-black and his lips were trembling.

She didn't speak to him. She couldn't speak to him. And he hadn't seen her. . . .

She turned away. She was numb and weak and aimless.

She turned away—and found that she was twisting her head this way and that as she looked for something. . . .

She wondered what she was looking for—and then knew.

She was looking for white-and-black silks. She was looking for Richard.

She said his name aloud.

"Oh, Richard!" she said—and then was conscious of a spreading, anguished ache which seemed at birth to fill her with power and yet to sap all her strength.

She said, "Richard!" again to herself—as if she'd never said the word before.

She had to find Richard. She had to find him—now, at once. The ache was filling her—and she knew suddenly what it was. It was sorrow—and sorrow for Richard. She was sorry for him—dreadfully, achingly sorry for him. She was filled with compassion for him. Without her knowledge, he had made this effort—for her: he had taken a liberty to bring about a triumph—for her: he had done the work superbly, magnificently—for her: and then, by sheer fortuitous accident, he had at one stroke been a decisive factor in a tragedy for her. . . . A dreadful thing to happen to a man; a tragic, useless thing to happen to a man! Bad for any man—and worse, far worse, for Richard than for all the other men she knew or had known or could imagine. . . .

Poor proud lonely Richard! Poor strong *sufficient* Richard—who would be blaming himself—who would most surely be blaming himself, twisting and distorting facts so that there was no room in his mind for anything but blame. . . .

She had to find him! She must find him!

She began to look for him—and she didn't find him. She didn't find him in the jockeys' rooms . . . nor in the stables . . . nor in the Secretary's office . . . nor in the Clubhouse. . . . Nor could she find Sherry to help her search. . . .

She didn't find him—and it wasn't until the last race had been run, and the crowds were dispersing, and the sun was low, that she was told he'd gone; gone immediately after they'd taken the horse away . . .

"The horse that broke his neck, y' know, Miss. . . . Well, Olivant jest stuck around till the knackers come. . . . Then he fixed up t'have the carcass took over t' his place. Peculiar notion, huh?—said he wanted to *bury* the horse or somethin'. . . . He beat it right after that. Hadn't even took off his silks—jest had a sweater an' a coat on over 'em. . . ."

Perhaps she heard it all, perhaps she didn't. But she knew he'd gone—and she knew she'd wasted all these precious hours. . . .

She ran for the car.

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## Chapter Sixteen

THE roadster purred up and around the twisting roads as if hills didn't exist. She caught a glimpse of the Inn windows as pale yellow squares above her—and then saw that the moon was splashing the tree tops.

She hadn't realized it was dark. The headlights were shining before her—but she didn't remember having switched them on.

"It's dark," she said aloud—and was startled by the sound of her voice. She hadn't known she was going to speak.

She drove up the hill and past the end of the Inn. The tires crashed and crackled on the gravel as she pulled up. She saw there was no light in the stables—but all the same she ran there. Perhaps he was in his room: perhaps he didn't want light. . . .

She checked her pace as she turned in at the gate. The lonely darkness struck her like a fist in the face. All the doors were shut—all of them. And there were no warm, rustling comfortable sounds. There was no one here—no equine, no human. There was no one here.

She walked slowly—very slowly now—toward the tack-room. She knew Richard wasn't there, she could feel he wasn't there—but she must go and see he wasn't there.

She passed the closed door of the box which had been Mac's—and for an instant her feet faltered and tears came

into her eyes and there was a lump in her throat which hurt her. She had seen his stable day-sheet dangling in pale, empty uselessness—and, on the hook next to it, limply lonely, the head-stall she would never again slip over the brave, wise head with its satiric twist of the lip.

She brushed at her eyes with the back of her hand—angrily. She started off again, making for the tackroom. She reached its little steps—and then stopped dead in her tracks as a figure loomed out of the shadows. She gasped, and her heart jumped into her throat. She was staring, in a mixture of fear and unbelief, at the scrawny, naked figure of the Hermit.

He was very close to her. He raised a lean arm and made gestures which she didn't understand. She wasn't afraid so much now—but she was bewildered.

He moved a shy, tense pace nearer to her. He looked as if he might, at any unforeseen sound or movement, wheel and flash away and disappear.

She stood absolutely still, looking at him. She knew, numbly, that what was happening was important to her—basically, tremendously important. She didn't know how she knew, but she knew.

The bearded face was twitching—and the stringy muscles of the neck were working. He was going to speak—and the effort of producing speech was shaking him.

Then his voice came out—harsh and uncertain, and ringing with a curious, discordantly metallic sound. There were long pauses between the words. "He's . . . down . . . there," said the voice—and now she understood that the gesticulating arm was pointing to the valley.

"At . . . the . . . rock," said the voice. "You . . . go . . . there!"

She stared at the thin, strange shape. It stood half in moonlight, half in shadow.

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you for telling me."

But before the words were out, she was alone. She heard a little sound on the gravel, and a whisper of the bushes—and she was alone.

The moonlight streamed into the amphitheater as she slithered and scrambled down the hill. She went along the willow fringe toward the passageway between the hills—but when she entered the cleft, she found the moonlight didn't reach into it and she was faced by a wall of darkness. She slackened her speed and went on, her head down, her arm across her face to shield it from the whipping willow-fronds. Under her feet the ground grew soft and marshy; then became water which splashed around her ankles . . .

The cleft widened and she could move away from the water onto dry earth. Moonlight came thinly down now between the buttress hills and she could see the rock ahead. It was black and huge. It was lonely and remote.

She reached it—and splashed into the water—and made her way around it.

On the shelving ledge upon the far side a dark figure was sitting. It was Richard. He was here, just as she had been told he would be here.

He was leaning forward, his face in his hands, his elbows on his knees. He was staring straight ahead of him. He was so still that he might almost have been part of the rock.

She went toward him. Her feet had splashed in the stream, and now they sounded faintly on the sandy soil, but he didn't move. He didn't hear her. He didn't know that he wasn't alone any more.

She said, "Richard!" and then, "Richard!" again.



She said, "My darling—it wasn't your fault. It wasn't!"

He raised his head and looked at her. He was like the rock—he was lonely and remote.

He said, "Janet! . . . What're you doing here? . . ."

And then he stopped—and she stood in front of him, close to him.

She said, "It wasn't your fault, Richard! I was there—and I know! . . . It just—happened that way!"

"It was my fault," he said. "I didn't have to send him into that Liverpool on the gray's tail. . . . We had plenty of time. . . . It was my fault!"

She drew closer to him and put her hand on his arm. It felt rigid and lifeless: it felt like stone.

He pulled it away from her. He said:

"You're not a fool. You know it was my fault. . . ." He dropped his face onto his hands. "And stop being so God-damned sorry for me!"

She stepped back away from him. She wanted to sit near him, and put her arms around him, and pull his head down onto her breast. But she stood away from him.

She looked down at his dark head. She wanted to shake him. She wanted to hit him in the face. She wanted to scream. . . .

There must be some way to reach him. There had to be some way to reach him!

She said, violently, "Don't be so God-damned sorry for yourself! . . . Mac's dead. He was a good horse—but he's dead. He's dead—whether you killed him—which you didn't—or whether it was accident, which it was!"

She stopped. She was confused and afraid. She was certain that she had made a mistake—a great mistake.

He raised his head slowly and looked up at her. She felt sick with pity for him.

She said, softly, "There are lots of worse ways to die, darling. As you told me, about Bruce. And Mac was doing the job he liked; doing it well. . . ."

He reached up his hands and took her hands in them. His eyes were alive again. They were shining because there were tears in them.

"I'm sorry, Janet," he said. "Good Christ, I'm sorry!"

They were in her house again—their house. She never would remember how they had reached it, but they were there. They were standing in front of the big window, looking down into the amphitheater. The moon was high now, and against its light their bodies made one tall dark shadow upon the floor behind them. She leaned closer to Richard and felt his arm tighten about her.

She said, "Will you do me a favor?" and didn't look at him.

"Try me!" His voice was very low.

"Will you marry me?" she said. "Please, Richard."

"Tomorrow." The arm tightened still more. "But I thought it was I who was to do the favor. . . ."

She was too happy to speak for a moment—but she stirred against his arm in a little while and turned her face up to him and smiled at him. She said:

"Do you love me, Richard? . . . Tell me now—because you'll be just as arrogant tomorrow—thank God!—and I won't ask you. . . ."

He put the other arm around her.

"I love you," he said. "I love you."

He kissed her, and she closed her eyes. She opened them again—and looked past his shoulder and out of the window. . . .

"Look, Richard!" she said. "Look!" Her voice was a

stifled, urgent whisper. She pointed—and he turned his head.

They were there, down in the amphitheater—the deer and the bobcat! And they were no less exciting because she had seen them before, exactly as they were now, moving out of the tree-shadow and down the moon-washed slope to the stream, the bobcat stealthy in the lead, the small deer stepping daintily at his heels. . . .

“You see!” She was triumphant. “You see! . . . Perhaps I wasn’t so tired that night, after all. . . .”

“I’ll be damned!” said Richard in a hushed voice. “I’ll be damned!”—and they watched in silence while the two lowered their heads to the shining water and drank deeply and then suddenly, as if something had startled them, flashed out of sight beneath the hill.

The little stage was empty again and it was difficult to believe they had been there.

“I’ll be damned!” said Richard again.

She pressed his arm. “Special Performance for Richard Olivant, Esquire!” She turned her head away slowly to look again at the stream and the little knoll and the farther tops of the encircling hills.

She moved to face him—and put her arms about him. She said:

“When are they going to send you away? And where are they going to send you?”

“I don’t know, darling.” He smiled down at her. “I don’t know anything. . . .”

She said, “When it’s all over—we will come back here, won’t we?”

THE END















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